

AN HISTORICAL AND RHETORICAL STUDY  
OF THE SPEAKING OF WILLIAM C. PRESTON

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## CHAPTER I

### "THE INSPIRED DECLAIMER": SYMBOL OF AN AGE

October 4, 1855, dawned brilliantly at King's Mountain, South Carolina. Scattered across the knolls and glens around the east base of the mountain were the tents of "a multitude" who had traveled "a weary way" to participate in the Seventy-fifth Anniversary Celebration of the famed Battle of King's Mountain. The "shrill whoop of a mountaineer" and the bugle blast of reveille announced the opening of the "great celebration day" as the sprawling forest camp stirred to life. Throughout the morning hours, "the ingathering of worshippers" continued, and, according to one reporter, "at nine o'clock a multitude had congregated together, numbering, according to different estimates, from eight to fifteen thousand persons."<sup>1</sup>

At 11:00 a. m., the time set for the opening of the ceremony, the multitude assembled around the speaker's stand erected on "the eastern activity of the mountain," in view of the battleground. Perhaps the most graphic description of the assemblage was recorded by a reporter of the Yorkville Enquirer. It was, he wrote, a "throng" composed

of all ages, sexes, and conditions--the gray-haired old man, who even now remembers, as if it were yesterday, the firing

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<sup>1</sup>Celebration of the Battle of King's Mountain and the Address of the Hon. John Smith Preston (Yorkville, S. C., 1855), 29. Cited hereafter as Celebration of the Battle of King's Mountain.

of the guns on the day of the battle . . . ; the venerable matron bringing the widow's mite to the common altar; full-grown, vigorous manhood, with the proud blood of the revolution beating at the heart and pulsating more and more quickly through every vein; the rude country lad, the city "swell," the bouncing lass, the dashing belle, the gallant soldier, decked out in all the trappings of war, the erect, independent backwoodsman, and, last of all, many a careless, devil-may-take-me specimen of "our peculiar institution."<sup>2</sup>

Seated on the colorfully-decorated speaker's stand was an impressive array of invited celebrities flanked by a squad of celebration officials. Among the out-of-state guests was George Bancroft, the fifty-six-year-old Massachusetts politician-historian whose avid interest in Revolutionary lore had drawn him to King's Mountain. Seated beside Bancroft was "the orator of the day," John Smith Preston, a wealthy South Carolina orator-soldier, widely known as a radical champion of state rights, and owner of "The Homus," a ten-thousand-acre Louisiana sugar plantation. Seated also among the invited dignitaries was the eldest brother of the orator of the day, and close friend of Bancroft, William Campbell Preston, now in his sixty-second year. South Carolina lawyer, politician, and educator, William C. had closed a brilliant oratorical career of almost a quarter of a century, creating in the lower South a small legend, epitomized in the words of the yeoman of the South Carolina sand hills who exclaimed, "That man used to talk like a mocking-bird!"<sup>3</sup> Described by his contemporaries at the apex of his career as six feet

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<sup>2</sup>Yorkville Enquirer, quoted, ibid., 25.

<sup>3</sup>Francis Lieber, An Address to the Graduating Class of S. C. College Commencement on the Necessity of Continued Self-Education (Columbia, 1851), 5.

three inches tall, red-haired, blue-eyed, ruddy complexioned, strong-featured, and inclining to corpulency, the Carolina orator was now white-haired and partially paralyzed. Yet animating his mien still was the "Prestonian manner," the mercurial temperament, easy grace, and proud dignity, which had contributed in its way to the legend of "the inspired declaimer."

Following the invocation, John Preston rose to address the vast gathering, and was greeted by "continued bursts of applause." "For two hours," wrote the Yorkville reporter, "the speaker held his auditory entranced, and during the time scarce a whisper was heard, save when the rapture inspired by his fervid, glowing eloquence, would force out, ever and anon, the enthusiastic expression of pleasure and delight."<sup>4</sup>

After the main address, ceremonies were continued with the proposal of a series of "regular toasts," followed by the presentation of various "relics of battle," one of which was the sword of General William Campbell, leader of the victorious American forces.<sup>5</sup> Then, Samuel W. Melton "proposed the following sentiment" to William Preston, grandson of General William Campbell:

Rekindled in the grandson, has been transmitted to us the spirit which gleamed in the sword of the grandsire. While we have assembled to honor the patriotic deeds of the one upon the battle-field, let us not forget the statesmanship and eloquence which have thrown a halo of imperishable glory around the other. In the fulness of age, as in the

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 33-34; L. C. Draper, King's Mountain and Its Heroes (Cincinnati, 1881).

pride and strength of manhood, South Carolina delights to do him reverence.<sup>6</sup>

After the "loud applause" had subsided, "the once proud and majestic form of the 'inspired declaimer,' now bent with age and tremblingly leaning upon the crutch for support, approached to the front of the stand." Flooded with emotion, Preston marshalled his strength to speak; for a moment, one observer reported, "the fire of genius, almost gone out, which had once commanded 'the applause of list'ning senates,' seemed to enkindle and burn as brightly as ever."<sup>7</sup>

The text of Preston's utterance on this occasion was given by the Yorkville Enquirer:

If anything could now relume the embers of a life which, at times in my youth and manhood, has perhaps burned brightly, it would be the sentiment which has just been uttered. It touches the objects which are dearest to me. It points to a life which has been animated by what I thought and hoped to be elevated objects of ambition, and to an ancestry whose memory has been most fondly cherished. Here, in these scenes of primeval grandeur, and upon a spot with which it has been the fortunes of that ancestry to be associated, it comes upon me with especial force; but if I could ever speak, I can speak no longer, and if excuse be needed, I would appeal to this (raising up his crutch) and to this, (laying his hand upon locks as white as snow) yet, still my heart, (laying his hand upon his breast)--but the utterance failed, and the "old man eloquent" bowed his head and wept, while the tear trickling

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<sup>6</sup>Yorkville Enquirer, quoted in Celebration of the Battle of King's Mountain, 35.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 35. Preston and Bancroft journeyed to the celebration together passing through Asheville, North Carolina. A newspaper reporter observed of Preston, "Although he is far from being what Wm. C. Preston was, like the broken vase, the inspiration of genius still clings around him; and the stranger, in listening to his fascinating conversation, is not surprised at being told that that man is Preston, 'the inspired orator.'" Asheville Spectator, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, October 10, 1855.

from every eye in that vast assembly, told the story of earnest sympathy, and paid tribute to the power of true eloquence,--the eloquence of feeling and of action, and of silence.<sup>8</sup>

Here was the expiring voice of William C. Preston, one of South Carolina's most widely acclaimed ante-bellum orators. For the student of American public address in general, and for the student of the total rhetorical activity of Preston in particular, this fragmentary address holds a double significance. First, as Preston's last public utterance it dramatizes the close of an epoch of oratory--an epoch which has been termed by one writer the "Federal period of Southern Oratory" (1788-1860).<sup>9</sup> Preston was the last of the great Clay-Webster-Calhoun coalition of the 1830's that sent its thunderous rhetoric against the stubborn Jackson Administration. The great "triumvirate" had passed from the nation's forums. Seargent S. Prentiss, the eloquent Mississippian, had died five years before. Hugh S. Legare, Preston's learned fellow South Carolinian, was no longer living. Contemporary of such South Carolina orators as McDuffie, Hamilton, Hayne, Harper, and Turnbull, Preston had survived them all. In nostalgic vein, Maximilian La Borde wrote a year before Preston's death, "He alone survives, the

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 35-36. J. H. Carlisle recalled almost half a century later: "Very few heard what he Preston said with that failing voice, but it was soon flashed into the minds of the thousands of beholders the melancholy discovery: That is all that is left of South Carolina's matchless orator. At that moment tears fell from eyes unused to weeping and Preston's public life was over." J. H. Carlisle, "Speech on William C. Preston," in J. H. Carlisle, Jr. (ed.), Addresses of J. H. Carlisle (Columbia, S. C., 1910), 192.

<sup>9</sup>Edward K. Graham, "The History of Southern Oratory During the Federal Period," The South in the Building of the Nation, 12 vols. (Richmond, 1909), IX, 30. Graham observes that "during the forty years preceding the Civil War," the absorbing question of deliberative address was, "What this constitution is." He also declares that "As a whole," the period was one in which the "political orator predominates. . . ."



solitary remnant of that glorious band of orators, and statesmen, and patriots."<sup>10</sup>

Preston fulfilled the aspirations of America's golden age of eloquence. During his most active years as a speaker (1822 to 1844), oratory achieved its highest peak of development in America. The period of Preston's oratorical career was productive of such orators as Clay, Webster, Calhoun, and John Quincy Adams, who by their commanding public utterances achieved the stature of orator-statesmen, and evoked the admiration of a whole nation. Ralph Waldo Emerson was but underscoring the place of public address in the national culture when he declared Webster on Bunker Hill to be "the representative of the American continent. . . ."<sup>11</sup>

Likewise during Preston's career the South as a separate region produced a steady stream of able speakers, among whom were, in addition to Clay and Calhoun, such men as Seargent S. Prentiss of Mississippi, Hugh S. Legare, Robert Y. Hayne, George McDuffie, and Robert Barnwell Rhett of South Carolina, Henry Washington Hilliard of Alabama, and many others. As Dickey has observed, "America has in no period produced greater orators than in the years of Prentiss' life."<sup>12</sup>

True it is that "In no period of American history was the

<sup>10</sup>Maximilian La Borde, History of the South Carolina College (Columbia, 1859), 289.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York, 1941), 20.

<sup>12</sup>Dallas C. Dickey, Seargent S. Prentiss: Whig Orator of the Old South (Baton Rouge, 1945), 338.

orator so influential as during the fifty years before the Civil War."<sup>13</sup>

The cultivation of oratory was a national habit--one which prompted comment from European visitors, some of whom "noted how unusually large a proportion of volumes issuing from our presses were speeches. . . ."

Foreign visitors like Tocqueville remarked on the vogue of debating clubs and the national enthusiasm for oratory.<sup>14</sup> In various other ways this enthusiasm for "eloquence" and "oratory" was evidenced.

Baskerville has observed:

Young men who aspired to leadership in any field were counseled that the cultivation of eloquence was the surest, speediest avenue to success. Writers were fond of referring to this country as a nation of speakers. . . . Besides, Americans were increasingly aware of themselves as a nation, a new democratic nation which they consciously patterned after the great democracies of antiquity. The same spirit which impelled them to name their cities Troy, Athens, and Ithica . . . caused them to apotheosize their orators and to compare Daniel Webster, the American, with Demosthenes, the Greek.<sup>15</sup>

Particularly significant in the culture of the ante-bellum South was the institution of oratory. "It is doubtful," declared one Southern historian, "if there ever has been a society in which the orator counted for more than he did in the Cotton Kingdom." In this culture, he went on to say, "The man who wished to lead or to teach must be able to speak. He could not touch the artistic sense of the people with pictures or statues or verses or plays; he must charm them

<sup>13</sup>Robert E. Spiller, et al. (eds.), Literary History of the United States (New York, 1953), 542.

<sup>14</sup>Matthiessen, American Renaissance, 18-20.

<sup>15</sup>Barnet Baskerville, "Principal Themes of Nineteenth Century Critics of Oratory," Speech Monographs, XIX (March, 1952), 11.

with voice and gesture."<sup>16</sup> Of this tradition was William C. Preston.

His brief effort at King's Mountain in 1855 not only marks roughly the close of the greatest age of American oratory; it also represents the final effort of an orator whose career and rhetorical practices were highly symbolic of the age which produced him. Though Preston was a legal advocate, a politician, and an educator, his chief claim to distinction rests upon his oratorical achievement. From his youth he cultivated the art of speaking as a matter of course. During the years of his active public life, he practiced the art assiduously at the bar, on the hustings, in the forum, and in the college classroom. Finally, Preston theorized on the art of speaking, advancing during his lifetime a number of concepts relative to the nature and function of rhetoric.

As one of the most widely acclaimed American orators of his age, Preston was referred to as "the Cicero of the American Senate," "the matchless orator," "the Prince of Rhetoricians," "South Carolina's Cicero," "the perfect orator," and "the inspired declaimer." Journalistic commentary on his speaking is replete with encomiastic passages such as the following, which may be regarded as typical:

I have never heard one who approximates more closely to the picture of the perfect orator drawn by the prince of Roman eloquence /Cicero/; who has more of the je ne sais quoi of eloquence, if I may so speak, which chains you to its car, and hurries you along with it wherever it goes.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>William Garrott Brown, The Lower South in American History (New York, 1902), 125-127. See, also, Francis Pendleton Gaines, Southern Oratory (University, Ala., 1946), 3.

<sup>17</sup>The Norfolk Herald, quoted in Charleston Mercury, March 7, 1834.

Preston's oratorical abilities also drew praise from some of the leading public figures of his day. James Buchanan believed the Carolinian could make not only "the best figures of speech" of anyone in the United States Senate, but also "the best arguments."<sup>18</sup> John Quincy Adams, who longed for Preston's elocutionary skill, declared in 1841, "I . . . think him the most accomplished orator now in the House."<sup>19</sup> Benjamin F. Perry also testified, "Col. Preston is one of the finest speakers and most eloquent men I ever heard. . . ."<sup>20</sup> Finally, the sophisticated Legare termed Preston "the greatest declaimer in the world,"<sup>21</sup> and Francis Lieber thought him "a master of the breathing word."<sup>22</sup>

While still other critics and observers assigned genuine stature to Preston's speaking, there were some, among them Calhoun, who were disposed to dismiss him as a "mere declaimer," who spoke in a "ranting" style and whose arguments were "loose, bold and unguarded."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in the Diary of Mrs. Penelope Davis Preston, 36, MSS, Caroliniana Library. Cited hereafter as Diary of Mrs. Penelope Preston.

<sup>19</sup>Charles Francis Adams (ed.), Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, 12 vols. (Philadelphia, 1874-1877), X, 241.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Lillian A. Kibler, Benjamin F. Perry (Durham, N. C., 1946), 63-64.

<sup>21</sup>Quoted in Walter L. Miller, "William C. Preston," The Green Bag, XII (January, 1900), 39.

<sup>22</sup>Lieber, An Address to the Graduating Class of S. C. College at Commencement on the Necessity of Continued Self-Education, 5.

<sup>23</sup>John C. Calhoun to Armistead Burt, Fort Hill, S. C., August 20, 1844, in J. Franklin Jameson (ed.), "Correspondence of John C. Calhoun," Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1892, 2 vols. (Washington, 1900), 163-164.

Significant also is the testimony of a discerning foreign traveler, who wrote in 1839, "Preston is called 'the ladies' speaker' and, indeed, he speaks more to the imagination than to calm and reflective listeners."<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, Preston was regarded generally by his age as an able orator, and his high reputation still lingered nearly a half-century following his death. Rufus R. Wilson stated at the turn of the nineteenth century, "Not a few claim him the most finished orator the South has ever produced."<sup>25</sup> In the same vein, Miller wrote in 1899 that "even today, when we would illustrate the perfection of oratorical attainment, there comes forth spontaneously from our lips, 'the silver-tongued Preston.'"<sup>26</sup>

Despite Preston's admirable oratorical reputation during his own age, it is paradoxical that he has attracted comment neither from the critic of American public address nor from the student of American history. He does not find place in such nineteenth-century works on speech criticism as William Matthews' Oratory and Orators, Frank Moore's American Eloquence, and David Harsha's Most Eminent Orators and Statesmen of Ancient and Modern Times. Only E. L. Magoon, in Living Orators in America, offers an evaluation of Preston's speaking. Likewise, Preston has been ignored in such twentieth-century works on speech criticism as Edgar D. Jones' Lords of Speech, and Warren C. Shaw's

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<sup>24</sup>M. de Hulsemann, *Sur les Principaux membres du Congrès, MSS, Kaiserliches und Konigliches Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, Vienna, Austria.*

<sup>25</sup>Rufus R. Wilson, Washington, the Capitol City, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1902), I, 294.

<sup>26</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit. (December, 1899), 588.



History of American Oratory. Moreover, seemingly only two graduate theses direct critical attention to Preston's public address.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Preston's career has failed to engage the efforts of historical scholars, except in an incidental way.

Thus, the student of Preston's total rhetorical activity may well inquire: Why is Preston, upon whose oratory his own age heaped praise, so little known in our own day? What was the nature of his oratorical career? With what causes and values was his speaking identified? What were his virtues and shortcomings as a speaker? To what extent was he a truly effective orator when measured by his ability to discover and employ the available means of persuasion in his numerous persuasive efforts? Did Preston achieve genuine stature as an orator? Was Professor Rosser H. Taylor correct in classing Preston among those South Carolina orators who "rose above platitudes and encomiums?"<sup>28</sup>

In answering these questions, it is essential, first of all, to inquire into the forces that conditioned Preston's utterance--to consider the environmental influences that shaped his rhetorical practice and informed his address. His oratorical career may then be

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<sup>27</sup>See Robert Gray Gunderson, "A Political and Rhetorical Study of the 1840 Presidential Campaign," unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1948, 491-493; Ray Robinson Williams, "Representative Ante-Bellum Oratory," unpublished M. A. Thesis, Department of English, University of South Carolina, 1924, 35-39.

<sup>28</sup>Rosser H. Taylor, "The Mud-Sill Theory in South Carolina," in Robert L. Merisether and Arney R. Childs (eds.), The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association (Columbia, 1939), 42.



traced with critical attention to his reported addresses. Finally, his ideas on the art of speaking may be ascertained, and a synthetic evaluation of his speaking formulated.

## CHAPTER II

### FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EARLY EDUCATION

Preston's speaking and speeches were the result of a number of influential factors which contributed either directly or indirectly to the moulding of his personality, his ideas, values and tastes, and his rhetorical skill. In large measure, his total rhetorical activity was affected by his family background, his early home environment, his childhood associates, and his early education and rhetorical training. These factors deserve delineation for the light they shed upon the nature and significance of Preston's public address.

One of the most influential forces in Preston's development as a speaker was his family background. A member of one of the First Families of Virginia, he was of distinguished Scotch-Irish lineage. In his veins flowed the blood of Patrick Henry, Lords Erskine and Brougham, and General William Campbell.<sup>1</sup> He was also related to Dolly Madison and the Floyds of Virginia.<sup>2</sup>

As a group, Preston's paternal forebears were persons of acumen, perseverance, dignity, and patriotic ardor. Among them,

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<sup>1</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., (September, 1899), 393. Miller records, "We are told that William C. Preston was cousin to Lord Brougham and Lord Erskine, they and Patrick Henry being nephews of Robertson, the Scotch historian."

<sup>2</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 6; New York Courier and Enquirer, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, December 20, 1831.

moreover, were some who figured prominently in Virginia's colonial history. The Virginia line of the Preston family, known as the "Prestons of Greenfield and Springfield," is said to have sprung from Sir George Preston, Baronet of Vallayfield, Fifeshire, Scotland.<sup>3</sup> The Virginia line was first established in America by John Preston, who emigrated from Ulster, Ireland, to Hanover County, Virginia, in 1738. Of John Preston, progenitor of the Virginia branch of the family, little is known except that he helped to settle a "thirty-thousand acre grant of Crownlands in tramontane Virginia."<sup>4</sup>

Of William Preston, John's son, and paternal grandfather of the subject of this study, much more is known. Born in 1729, in Londonderry, Ireland, he came to America with his parents at the age of eight years. Extant records show that "his first regular employment was posting the books of Staunton [Virginia] merchants and in aiding his uncle [Captain James Patton] in his extensive business."<sup>5</sup> Subsequent to his marriage to Susanna Smith of "Rocky Ridge" plantation, Hanover County, William rose gradually to more responsible employments. Much of his life was devoted to military duties. In early manhood he commanded one of three companies of Rangers organized by Dinwiddie, in order to protect Virginia's western frontier after Braddock's debacle on the Monongahela.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the American

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<sup>3</sup>Preston Davis to the writer, New York, N. Y., March 9, 1950.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Alexander M. Weddell, Supplement to the Annals of Augusta County, Virginia (Richmond, 1888), 402.

<sup>6</sup>Preston Davis to the writer, New York, N. Y., March 9, 1950.

Revolution, William served in the Virginia General Assembly,<sup>7</sup> and received appointment as "County Lieutenant of Fincastle and Montgomery [Counties]."<sup>8</sup> A "zealous compatriot" and "personal friend" of George Washington,<sup>9</sup> he was remembered by his grandson, William C., as "a conspicuous Whig of the Revolution."<sup>10</sup> In command of a regiment, he "performed the difficult and highly responsible service of holding the western frontier of Virginia against the strong Tory elements there."<sup>11</sup> Of "imposing presence and pleasing address," he has been characterized as "a man of more culture than was common in his time and section of the country."<sup>12</sup> Evidences of his taste for polite letters are seen in his devotion to the building of a large personal library, and in his dabbling occasionally in verse.<sup>13</sup>

Even more prominent in the political and military affairs of Virginia was William's second son, Francis Smith, father of William C. Preston. Subsequent to his graduation from William and Mary College in 1783, Francis, after the habit of Virginia gentry, began

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<sup>7</sup>Alexander M. Waddell (ed.), A Memorial Volume of Virginia Historical Portraiture, 1585-1830 (Richmond, 1880), 305.

<sup>8</sup>William B. Preston, Genealogy of the Preston Family (Salt Lake City, 1900), 160.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Yarborough (ed.), The Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 1.

<sup>11</sup>Preston Davie to the writer, New York, N. Y., March 9, 1950.

<sup>12</sup>Waddell, Supplement to the Annals of Augusta County, Virginia, 402.

<sup>13</sup>Preston, Genealogy of the Preston Family, 160.

the study of law. Following his admission to the Virginia bar, he practiced in Montgomery and Washington Counties. Turning next to the "absorbing game of politics," Francis served from 1788-1789 as a member of the Virginia State House of Delegates, and from 1793-1797 in Congress. Declining to be a candidate for renomination, he settled at Saltville, Virginia, and resumed the practice of law. But politics held an abiding attraction for him. From 1812 to 1814 Francis was again a member of the Virginia State House of Delegates, and from 1816 to 1820 he served in the Virginia State Senate.<sup>14</sup> Available accounts indicate that he was a "lawyer of ability."<sup>15</sup> Wealth, gentle blood, sociability, and aspiration brought him a conspicuous place in patrician circles. He is said to have been on "terms of intimacy with Madison, Monroe, Jefferson, and Chief-Justice Marshall."<sup>16</sup> Francis' marriage to Sarah Buchanan Campbell on January 10, 1793, united two of Virginia's most illustrious families.

Sarah Campbell was the only surviving child of General William Campbell, whose branch of the famous Campbell family came from Argyll, Scotland. John Campbell, representing the first generation of the Virginia branch, migrated to America in 1726 with his wife, and "five

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<sup>14</sup>Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927 (Washington, D. C., 1928), 1430; Weddell, A Memorial Volume of Virginia Historical Portraiture, 304; Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., (September, 1899), 393.

<sup>15</sup>Preston, Genealogy of the Preston Family, 192.

<sup>16</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., (September, 1899, 393.

or six grown sons and several daughters. . . .<sup>17</sup> Beyond the bare facts of strict genealogy little is known of the first three generations of this Campbell branch. That all were residents of Augusta or Washington County, however, seems certain.<sup>18</sup>

But General William Campbell, the maternal grandfather of William C. Preston, holds a notable place in the annals of the American Revolution. Born in 1745, the only son of Charles Campbell, he settled, after his marriage to Elizabeth Henry, sister of Patrick Henry, in the Holston River Valley near Aspenvale, Virginia.<sup>19</sup> He rose quickly to prominence in Augusta County, serving as a justice, and as a delegate to the Virginia Legislature. Like Colonel William Preston, he owed his distinction to military accomplishment.<sup>20</sup> The apex of his career occurred on October 7, 1780, when, as "officer of the day" in the Battle of King's Mountain, he led nine hundred back-woodsmen to victory against the troops of the Loyalist Commander, Ferguson.<sup>21</sup>

Campbell has been described as "a typical pioneer" of "superb physique, six feet two inches high, straight, and soldierly in his bearing, quiet and polished in manners, and always deferential

<sup>17</sup>Weddell, Supplement to the Annals of Augusta County, Virginia, 396.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.; Gwathmey, Twelve Virginia Counties, 383, 393.

<sup>19</sup>Weddell, Supplement to the Annals of Augusta County, Virginia, 396.

<sup>20</sup>Allen Johnson (ed.), Dictionary of American Biography, 26 Vols. (New York, 1929), III, 465.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.; Anonymous, "Two Leaves of Revolutionary History," American Whig Review, VIII (December, 1848), 580-581.



and chivalric toward women." But his leading mark of character seems to have been his abiding and corrosive hatred of Tories.<sup>22</sup>

William C. Preston was "well-born," as he noted in his Reminiscences; and "my mother in my youth did not fail to let me understand it."<sup>23</sup> Alongside the list of American notables making up his distinguished Scotch-Irish lineage were added the names of the British orators, Erskine and Brougham. Certainly if inheritance is a factor in oratorical success, then the young Preston was greatly favored.

Preston's development as a speaker was further stimulated and shaped by early environmental influences. Preston was born on December 22, 1794. Because of the circumstance that his father was attending Congress as a representative from Virginia, Preston was born in Philadelphia instead of Augusta County, Virginia. In his Reminiscences, he noted pridefully: "It was a tradition in my family that I was the first born of a government official at the seat of government and [George] Washington being an acquaintance of my father and mother came to see the new born citizen."<sup>24</sup> He could also have recorded that the "new born citizen" was welcomed into the world by no less a personage than Dolly Madison, wife of James Madison, a congressional colleague of his father.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Thomas L. Preston, A Sketch of Mrs. Elizabeth Russell, Wife of General William Campbell, Sister of Patrick Henry (Nashville, 1888), 13. Cited hereafter as A Sketch of Mrs. Elizabeth Russell.

<sup>23</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 2.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>25</sup>Thomas L. Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian (Richmond, 1900), 135.

Preston passed his early childhood on the sprawling family estate near Saltville, Virginia, where his parents had established their residence in 1797. The home atmosphere of the Preston mansion was one of cultivated ease. In the elegantly furnished two-story house, which sat on a knoll overlooking the marshy salt flats, young Preston was taught the art of gracious living. His aristocratic parents modeled their manners and tastes after their kind, surrounding themselves with elegant furniture and expensive silverware. Also, Francis Preston provided his home with a large library, which had been stocked with the works of standard authors, classic and modern.<sup>26</sup>

Doubtless, Preston also imbibed an interest in oratory from his home environment, since the art of speaking was a significant feature of his family tradition. His father practiced the art as a lawyer and politician. Moreover, young Preston heard many stirring stories of Patrick Henry's impassioned rhetoric, not only from his mother but also from his maternal grandmother, the sister of Patrick.

A most influential force in Preston's early life was his mother, whose profile he drew with obvious pride:

She was a lady of beautiful person, a strong mind and a lofty character. Accustomed in her youth to the circle to which Washington gave the tone, her manners retained always a certain stateliness, which with her majestic person and high manners, made her a conspicuous figure. Her wealth and her maniere a due in some sort segregated her family from the poorer and plainer community in which

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<sup>26</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., (September, 1899), 393; Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 135-136.

she lived, and thus in my earlier childhood my associates were almost entirely domestic.<sup>27</sup>

From his mother Preston may have acquired his courtly and polished manner, so often observed by his contemporaries. Also, because of his mother's "maniere a due," he was shielded in large measure in early childhood from associations with the children of the yeomanry. In this cloistered atmosphere young Preston was "the idol of an extensive circle of most partial relatives."<sup>28</sup>

Chief among the admiring relatives was Preston's maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Russell, widow of General William Campbell. Of the six Preston children, William was her declared favorite. Since Elizabeth had been provided with a separate home on the Preston estate "across the Valley," young Preston was able to pass many hours with her. This association, significantly, brought Preston in touch with the minds of some of the leading Virginia evangelicals of the day. For Elizabeth, a fervid and devout Methodist, made her house "the home of the preachers." Her residence became a veritable terminus for circuit-riding evangelists. McKendree, Whatcoat, and Asbury were among her many guests. Young Preston, who often "brought corn from the mill for their horses," attended their impromptu worship services, and conversed with them freely. To Elizabeth's door came also the "poor and distressed" in search of "relief and sympathy and wise counsel."<sup>29</sup> Thus it transpired that Preston gradually pushed out of

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<sup>27</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 2.

<sup>28</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., (September, 1899), 394.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 393-394; Preston, A Sketch of Mrs. Elizabeth Russell, 20.

the cloistered atmosphere of his early childhood.

Elizabeth Henry Russell also wielded a considerable hand in young Preston's early education, though in precisely what manner is not known. Preston himself, at the height of his career, publicly credited her as having had "the charge of his education."<sup>30</sup> Moreover, he claimed that it had been chiefly "through her instrumentality," that he "occupied the position he then held."<sup>31</sup>

Preston's formal training was carefully conceived and deliberately executed. His father, himself dedicated to the life of law and politics, determined that his eldest son should be the beneficiary of the finest training that purse and times could afford. Of his father's ambition, William wrote, "His notion, impressed upon me from my earliest days, was that I was to be a well educated man and then to study law as my life time profession. This was always his purpose and my own never deviated from it."<sup>32</sup> In broad outline, the elder Preston's "plan of education" was that William "should go thro' some Southern College, then to Yale or Princeton," completing his "course" in Europe.<sup>33</sup> As actually accomplished, however, the details of the plan were markedly altered, not only by circumstance but by design. The result was a scheme somewhat less stereotyped than the usual patrician pattern.

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<sup>30</sup>Niles' National Register, LVI (August 24, 1839), 416.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid. Preston was then the junior Senator from South Carolina.

<sup>32</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 5.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

Preston's early formal training was entrusted to private tutors who lived in the Preston home. Of the "first stage" of his education, Preston declared:

Our letters were taught to us by an Irishman named Peter Byrnes, a weaver by trade who had come into my grandfather's family as far back as 1780, and had continued to teach letters to successive children of the family. . . He taught us to read in the Testament and to cipher as far as the rule of three, which was the extent of his curriculum.<sup>34</sup>

Preston records, further, that under Byrnes' direction, he "learned with facility," and was "of good behaviour."

More congenial to his tastes were the teaching techniques employed by Hercules Whaley, who assumed responsibility for Preston's training upon the death of Byrnes in 1808. Preston, then aged fourteen, was fascinated by Whaley, whom he described as "a man of rare and curious accomplishments." Though Whaley remained in the Preston household "for many years . . . there was always a mystery hanging about him," wrote Preston. With his "mysterious" mentor Preston shared a room, as well as the household chores. Whaley and his devoted pupil "rose and walked and sat together," thus keeping Preston's "process of education . . . continually going on."<sup>35</sup>

Eminently fitted to conduct Preston's training, Whaley was found to be a capital Latin scholar, familiar with the Classics contained in that language, not ignorant of Greek, and speaking French pretty well. Besides he had eminent skill in music, and sang and played upon the violin with wonderful execution.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.



With the versatile Whaley's guidance, together with the help of his father's "very good library," Preston made deep excursions into polite letters. Teacher and student "read together most of the Latin classics and many of the English."<sup>37</sup> To Whaley, doubtless, belongs much of the credit for inculcating in Preston an avid and abiding taste for belles lettres and the fine arts.<sup>38</sup>

To Whaley also belongs, in all probability, the credit for stimulating in Preston an enthusiastic interest in oratorical delivery, for under Whaley Preston received his first formal training in speech. Significantly, Whaley included in his curriculum the oral interpretation of poetry, and Preston noted that Whaley "read and recited poetry with exquisite power."<sup>39</sup> Noting Whaley's technique, Preston wrote:

In reading to me fine passages of poetry he would be seized with such enthusiasm as to rise from his seat, assume a theatrical attitude in the floor and acclaim it with dramatic intonations swept away with excitement.<sup>40</sup>

Preston made quick and notable educational advancement under Whaley's expert tutelage. High tribute was paid this teacher by Preston near the close of his own life. Speaking of his three-year course of training at South Carolina College, he wrote, "[Here I had] gone thro

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>38</sup>"His tastes in these particulars, as well as in oratory, were owing to his natural genius, and in no small measure to his having, in early years, a teacher eminently qualified to cultivate these gifts of nature. I refer to Mr. Hercules Whaley. . . ." Rion, "Speech on William C. Preston," loc. cit., 4.

<sup>39</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 3.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 3-4.



pretty much such acquaintances as I had made under Whaley."<sup>41</sup>

The next stage of Preston's formal training was more lackluster. Whaley had been an intellectual cornucopia. Washington Academy at Lexington, Virginia, which Preston attended was, on the other hand, something less than mentally stimulating. Founded as Augusta Academy in 1749 to serve the flood of Scotch-Irish immigrants then spreading over the mountains of Virginia, Washington Academy was chartered in 1792 as Liberty Hall, and was renamed Washington Academy in 1798, in honor of George Washington, who in that year conferred upon the struggling institution a sizeable gift of shares in a canal company.<sup>42</sup> From its inception the institution had been distinguished neither by outstanding curricula nor by noteworthy instruction. "But my parents thought," Preston wrote, "(mistakenly as I have since believed) that their boy ought to be sent to a public school. . . ."<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, young Preston enrolled in Washington Academy in September, 1809.<sup>44</sup> The curriculum of the Academy was "a college course of four years, [which] corresponded nearly with the course pursued in Princeton College at the same time."<sup>45</sup> By virtue of Preston's solid advancement

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>42</sup>Sidney L. Baxter, "Notes on the History of Washington Academy and College from 1799 to 1829," Washington and Lee University Historical Papers, No. 3 (Baltimore, 1892), 50-52.

<sup>43</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 4.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.; Martha R. Cullipher to the writer, Lexington, Virginia, September 26, 1956.

<sup>45</sup>William H. Ruffner, "Early History of Washington College," Washington and Lee University Historical Papers, No. 1 (Lexington, Va., 1891), 91-92.

in the languages and polite letters under Whaley, he passed the examination "on the branches allotted to the Language Class," and was admitted to the second, or "Mathematical Class."<sup>46</sup> Academy regulations stipulated that the

Mathematical Class shall spend one year in the study of Arithmetic, the first six books of Euclid's Elements, Trigonometry, Surveying, Navigation, Algebra and Conic Sections.<sup>47</sup>

The mode of instruction at the time of Preston's enrollment "was by recitation from textbooks." Declares Baxter:

Questions were put, and conversations had, to induce them to search for and apply to the subjects of the lessons . . . ; to induce them to search for and apply to the subject all the information that could be derived from collateral and analogous subjects. . . . The text-books were the most approved standard works on the subjects taught.<sup>48</sup>

Yet, despite such well-executed classroom method, Preston found little nourishment in the curriculum. Mathematics he found less than inspiring. Student manners he found plebeian. Teachers he found bibulous, inept, and indolent. For Preston, the young patrician with a belletristic bent, it was indeed a pale session.

[It was] a college superintended by lazy and ignorant Presbyterian preachers, and filled with dirty boys of low manners and morals. In six months at this place I unlearned as much as it was possible for a boy of sprightly parts to unlearn in six months. . . .<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Martha R. Cullipher to the writer, Lexington, Virginia, September 26, 1956.

<sup>47</sup>Ruffner, "Early History of Washington College," loc. cit., 92.

<sup>48</sup>Baxter, "Notes on the History of Washington Academy and College from 1799 to 1829," loc. cit., 50-51.

<sup>49</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 4.

Perhaps Preston's appraisal of his six months at the Academy was too austere, for there he was able to carry forward his speech training in the Graham Literary Society. Indeed, Preston assisted in the establishment of the Society, the Academy's first.<sup>50</sup> Society records indicate that he was one of the nine signers of the first constitution, which was reported and adopted on September 8, 1809.<sup>51</sup> Also, Preston was elected the Graham Society's first Vice President.<sup>52</sup>

The second and third articles of the Society's original constitution stipulated two types of membership, "corresponding" and "ordinary." Corresponding members were those not regularly enrolled in the Academy. Ordinary members, comprised of regularly enrolled academy students, met "every Friday in the month during the session except the fourth." "During the earlier years," wrote Ruffner, "the sole object of the society was to debate questions, and books were wanted chiefly for reference."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>William H. Ruffner, "History of Washington College," Washington and Lee University Historical Papers, No. 4 (Baltimore, 1894), 57. That Preston felt indebted to the Society which he helped to found seems evident in the light of an address which he delivered before the Society some thirty years later. Ruffner, a Grahamite who heard the speech, records that Preston gave an account of the origin of the Society "and of the clear and affectionate remembrance in which he had always held it." Ruffner's reaction to Preston's address is also revealing: "Mr. Preston's manner was not what some of us expected from so distinguished an orator; it was so natural, so colloquial, so affectionate, and yet so commanding in its effect! From that time on, the 'start theatric' and sesquipedalian bombast was afraid to show itself in Graham Hall. We had received a lasting object lesson in regard to that much misunderstood product called Eloquence!" Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>51</sup>Signers of the original Graham Society constitution were John D. Paxton, Edward C. Carrington, James W. Paxton, Gustavus A. Jones, John F. Wilson, William C. Preston, Uel Wilson, and Joseph S. Brown. Ibid., 57.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

Various types of questions engaged the energies of the early members of the Graham Society: civil, literary, educational, as well as religious. More specifically:

The society discussed whether Herod was justifiable in beheading John the Baptist; Queen Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots, were brought to the dissecting table frequently, though always with a large majority for Mary. The right of Secession was discussed twice, and voted down both times. Slavery was discussed, and condemned. The Louisiana Purchase was pronounced inexpedient; the forced sale of a man's property for debt was condemned. The majority of members liked Mr. Jefferson's administration better than that of John Adams. They discussed marriage, but did not consider it a failure. Psychological questions, free trade, forms of government, and many other familiar questions were discussed, often with as much zeal as if they were new and of the greatest practical importance.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, Preston was enabled, through the Graham Society which he assisted in establishing, to continue in a more formal manner the rhetorical training begun under Whaley.

Preston was the beneficiary of the educational advantages afforded the sons of the Virginia gentry. Born of distinguished lineage, he passed his early days in a home environment of cultivated ease from which he imbibed an interest in polite letters and oral communication. To his advantage in developing the skills of speech was his association and study with a capable tutor, and his participation in debating at Washington Academy. The early stages of his preparation for a law career had been accomplished in the Old Dominion. To South Carolina, however, he became indebted for the next stage of his formal education.

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 59-60.

### CHAPTER III

#### AT THE FEET OF MAXCY

When Preston entered upon his three-year course of study at South Carolina College in December, 1810, he had a firm grounding in the Latin and English classics, as well as a marked interest in polite letters. He was also not without background in certain of the exact sciences. More important, Preston brought with him to the campus of the newly-founded college a bent for rhetorical activity; significant speech experiences had been gathered under the eyes of Whaley and in the hall of the Graham Society at Lexington.

Preston's enrollment in South Carolina College was more the result of circumstance than of design. After completing the six-month session at Washington Academy, he was "affected with some slight hemorrhage of the lungs," and his "anxious parents" deemed the condition serious enough to warrant their sending him "into a Southern latitude."<sup>1</sup>

Florida was settled upon as the state to which young Preston would repair for the remainder of the winter months. By horseback, under the charge of a Negro servant, Preston proceeded southward. But the small procession never reached Florida. Preston wrote:

Columbia [South Carolina] lay in my way. . . . There I met with several young men, Charleston boys who had come up to join the South Carolina College. These youngsters

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<sup>1</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 4-5.



whose address and manners were very attractive very easily persuaded me that I was far enough South for my health and that the new and flourishing College . . . was a fit place to obtain an education. So after a night of anxious thought I acquiesced.<sup>2</sup>

While Preston was fearful that his academic preparation was inadequate, and anticipated that his examiners might find him deficient in the classics, his showing on the entrance examinations was favorable.<sup>3</sup> On Christmas day, 1809, he was "admitted into the Sophomore class. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

South Carolina College in 1809 was nearing the end of its fourth year of operation. Chartered by the state legislature December 19, 1801,<sup>5</sup> it had not actually admitted students until January 10, 1805.<sup>6</sup> But by 1810, the fledgling institution had produced a surprisingly large number of men who became influential leaders in the South.<sup>7</sup>

Founded with the intent of providing training for statesmanship,

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>3</sup>La Borde records an interesting incident of Preston's examination in the classics. The examining professor, Dr. Park, gave Preston a passage from Virgil's Aeneid for translation. "The Latin was read to the Professor, and he was asked by the candidate if he would accept the translation of Dryden. To this he assented, and after fifteen or twenty lines were repeated, the Professor remarked: 'That will do for Latin.'" La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 284-285.

<sup>4</sup>Minutes of the Faculty of South Carolina College, December 25, 1809, MS, Caroliniana Library.

<sup>5</sup>Daniel Walker Hollis, South Carolina College, 1801-1865, 2 vols. (Columbia, S. C., 1951), I, 22.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>7</sup>The college rolls prior to 1810 are replete with the names of men who achieved prominence in their chosen fields, such as Stephen D. Miller, James Gregg, William Harper, James L. Petigru, William J. Grayson, and Warren R. Davis.



South Carolina College had been lovingly nurtured by the state government from its inception. High state officials sat upon its board of trustees, as well as judges of the court of equity, who served in an ex officio capacity. The institution's charter provided that the state legislature should elect thirteen members of the board for regular terms. The young institution had also been insured ample financial support by a generous legislature.<sup>8</sup>

In formulating a curriculum for the college, the trustees leaned heavily upon the standard curriculum of New England institutions. They preferred the single liberal arts college to the multiple-college institution; the classical curriculum to the utilitarian. There was no provision for electives.

The course of study Preston pursued during his three years at the college, as outlined in the "Rules and Regulations of the South Carolina College," was as follows:

Sec. 5. The studies of the Sophomore year shall be Homer's Iliad, Horace, Vulgar and Decimal Fractions, with the extractions of Roots, Geography, Watt's Logic, Blair's Lectures, Algebra, the French Language and Roman Antiquities.

Sec. 6. The studies of the Junior year shall be Elements of Criticism, Geometry Theoretical and Practical, Astronomy, Natural and Moral Philosophy, French, Longinus de Sublimitate, and Cicero de Oratore.

Sec. 7. The studies of the Senior year shall be Millot's Elements of History, Demosthenes' Select Orationes, and such parts of Lock's Essay as shall be prescribed by the Faculty. The Seniors, also, shall review such parts of the studies of the preceding year, and perform such exercises in the higher branches of the mathematics as the Faculty may direct.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 22-24.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 3.

In essence, then, the curriculum was heavily classical with the emphasis upon mathematics, polite literature, and rhetoric, although science and modern languages were not excluded. One writer has stated, "The emphasis upon the ancient classics was less exclusive [in the college curricula of the South] than is generally supposed,"<sup>10</sup> and "Education in the South was not nearly so unpractical as it seems to the modern mind; it was certainly not ill adapted to the training of leaders in law, politics, and theology."<sup>11</sup>

Concerned, as they were with the business of training the sons of South Carolina for statesmanship, the trustees made ample provision in the curriculum for the study of rhetoric. Even the student who entered as a sophomore (as Preston did) had the opportunity to study three significant treatises on rhetorical theory, as well as certain selected speeches of Demosthenes.

In his sophomore year, Preston was introduced to Hugh Blair's widely-read Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres. His diet of rhetorical theory in the junior year consisted in two significant treatises of antiquity: Cicero's De Oratore, and Pseudo-Longinus On the Sublime. In these rhetorical treatises--two ancient and one modern--was constituted the corpus of rhetorical theory to which Preston was introduced during his years at South Carolina College. They were undoubtedly influential agents in the shaping of his rhetorical practices, and in forming the background against which his own

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<sup>10</sup>Jay B. Hubbell, The South in American Literature (Durham, N. C., 1954), 178.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

theoretical formulations about rhetoric were accomplished.

Significant also in Preston's rhetorical training at South Carolina College was Dr. Jonathan Maxcy, Professor of Belles Lettres, Criticism, and Methods. Prior to his appointment in 1804, as the first president of the College, Maxcy had filled with distinction the presidencies of Rhode Island and Union Colleges. Until his death in 1820, he managed not only the administrative affairs of the young College, but also the chair of belles lettres. That he was eminently qualified to direct the education of the high-mettled youth who came under his tuition is evident from the testimony of both his colleagues and his students.

A favorite subject of eulogy for many years after his death, Maxcy was acclaimed by his admirers as an able scholar, and several commented on the breadth of his learning. One contemporary believed Maxcy "one of the most learned men our country has produced."<sup>12</sup> Robert Henry, a former student, credited his mentor with having "extended his researches into every branch of human inquiry. . . ."<sup>13</sup> An omnivorous reader, Maxcy moved with ease in the fields of polite literature, rhetoric, metaphysics, politics, theology, and "the profound parts of science." But, as some contemporaries noted, Maxcy was more at home with "the abstruse enquiries of Metaphysics and speculative Theology. . . ."<sup>14</sup> Many noticed too--and regarded it a flaw in his scholarship--

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<sup>12</sup>Romeo Elton, quoted in J. C. Hungerpillar, "A Sketch of the Life and Character of Jonathan Maxcy," Bulletin of the University of South Carolina, No. 58 (July, 1917), 41.

<sup>13</sup>Robert Henry, An Eulogy on Jonathan Maxcy, D. D. (Columbia, S. C., 1822), 7.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 6.

that he lacked "a thorough and critical knowledge of the languages of antiquity."<sup>15</sup> All agreed, however, that Maxcy was an accomplished scholar.

Likewise, Maxcy's former students credited him with effectively communicating his vast stores of knowledge. He was a highly informative, as well as a provocative, classroom lecturer. On the west face of the Maxcy Monument, which stands in the center of the University of South Carolina campus, appears an inscription which reads in part, "He performed the duties of teacher with such skill, that while he imparted knowledge, he at the same time, by an easy and correct method, taught the art of investigating truth and reasoning well."<sup>16</sup> O'Neill maintained that Maxcy's real worth could not be "correctly" appreciated "unless he be heard in his lecture room."<sup>17</sup> Mild and unassuming in manner, Maxcy "treated his pupils with kindness," was ever careful to adapt his instruction to their level of attainment,<sup>18</sup> and explained his ideas with "clearness, precision, and facility."<sup>19</sup>

To the teaching of rhetoric, Maxcy appears to have brought not

<sup>15</sup>Hungerpillar, "A Sketch of the Life and Character of Jonathan Maxcy," loc. cit., 42.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted, ibid., 39. The chiseled inscriptions on the four faces of the Maxcy Monument were composed in English by George McDuffie of the Class of 1812, and rendered into Latin by Professor Robert Henry.

<sup>17</sup>John B. O'Neill, An Oration Delivered Before the Clariosophic Society Incorporate and the Inhabitants of Columbia, On the Anniversary of the Society, December 6, 1826 (Charleston, S. C., 1827), 16.

<sup>18</sup>Hungerpillar, "A Sketch of the Life and Character of Jonathan Maxcy," loc. cit., 42.

<sup>19</sup>Henry, An Eulogy on Jonathan Maxcy, 7.

only a firm theoretical and critical grasp of the subject, but also no little personal skill in the practice of oratory. La Borda believed that Maxcy gave "a larger attention" to rhetoric than to any other subject.

[He] felt that it had its philosophy, and strove to master its principles. . . . He knew that the foundation of all eloquence was laid in nature--that the appeal must be to the man as he is, . . . that it has power only as it arouses a feeling of common sympathy. He was familiar with the noblest examples of the art in ancient and modern times, and read with the eye of a philosopher the productions which have given them immortality, and strove to discover the secret of their marvellous effects.<sup>20</sup>

Abundant testimony exists to indicate that Maxcy was considered an example of effectiveness in speaking. A former Baptist minister, he was regarded "at the North" as "unrivalled in the pulpit." It was La Borda's opinion that, "Judged by the only true test, the effect, he was unsurpassed."<sup>21</sup> Though slight in stature, Maxcy was of "commanding" mien.<sup>22</sup> One writer described him as having a dark complexion and dark eyes, with "very black hair, cut short in front and combed or brushed straight down around his forehead."<sup>23</sup> In the use of language, Maxcy worked for precision and simplicity.<sup>24</sup> One view was that he was "little solicitous of ornament, but contented himself with a diction

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<sup>20</sup>La Borda, History of the South Carolina College, 114.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>John B. O'Neill, quoted, ibid., 110.

<sup>23</sup>Edwin J. Scott, Random Recollections of a Long Life (Columbia, S. C., 1884), 75.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.



at once pure, simple, and chaste. . . .<sup>25</sup> Many of Mancy's contemporaries commented on the effectiveness of his physical delivery.

Pettigru's description is typical: "His Elocution was . . . winning and peculiar. He spoke in the most deliberate manner; his voice was clear and gentle; his action composed and quiet."<sup>26</sup>

Mancy stressed rhetorical training during his years as President of the College. Section 8 of the "Rules and Regulations" of the institution stipulated that "From the time of their admission into college, the students shall be exercised in Composition and public speaking."<sup>27</sup> These exercises, conducted daily, were under the direction of the faculty. In addition, provision was made for "public exhibitions, and competition in speaking" to be handled according to the wishes of the faculty. Finally, it was required that "every member of the Senior class shall, at least once each month, deliver an oration of his own composition, after submitting it to be perused and corrected by the President."<sup>28</sup>

Another influential factor in Preston's speech training at South Carolina College was the extra hours of practice afforded by the Euphradian Literary Society, which he joined during his first year on the campus.<sup>29</sup> The Euphradian Society, along with its sister society,

<sup>25</sup>Henry, An Eulogy on Jonathan Mancy. 10.

<sup>26</sup>James L. Pettigru, quoted in Hungerpillar, "A Sketch of the Life and Character of Jonathan Mancy," loc. cit., 44.

<sup>27</sup>Quoted in La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 31.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>The Catalogue of the Euphradian Society lists for the year



the Clariosophic, was established February 6, 1806, by a division of the old Philomathic Society.<sup>30</sup>

During the period of Preston's enrolment, the two societies held their meetings in the College Chapel. The original scheme was that the two societies should alternate their meeting hours between afternoon and evening. One society convened at two o'clock on Saturday; the other after supper.<sup>31</sup> The following Saturday the hours were reversed. In addition to the system of alternate weekly meetings, the two societies made further provision for joint meetings. Article 3 of the "Constitution of the Synapian Convention," which established the regulations for the guidance of the societies when they met in joint session, stated:

On the second Saturday in Feb., 1806, and every seventh Saturday succeeding, except in vacation and two weeks afterward, shall be held by the members of the Clariosophic and Euphradian Societies a general meeting called the Synapian Convention at 2 o'clock p.m. at which respectable persons may be admitted as spectators.<sup>32</sup>

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1810, twenty regular members. Interestingly, Preston was the only out-of-state member on the rolls. Of the total number, six are listed as Charlestonians. Catalogue of the Euphradian Society of the South Carolina College (Columbia, S. C., 1847), 6.

<sup>30</sup>La Berde, History of the South Carolina College, 427.

<sup>31</sup>Section 1 of Article 3 of the Euphradian Constitution stipulated: "The society shall convene, every Saturday after supper, 5 minutes after the swing, of the bell, except as hereafter provided." The remainder of the section is devoted to clarification of the arrangements for alternate meetings with the Clariosophic. The Euphradian Society Constitution, 1806-1841, MS, Caroliniana Library.

<sup>32</sup>The Clariosophic and Euphradian Societies, 1806-1931 (Columbia, S. C., 1931), 16.

At the joint meetings, three members from each Society engaged in debate on a question chosen by the two societies.

The objectives of the Euphradian Society, as stated in the preamble of its constitution, were "to obtain a knowledge of Science, in general but more particularly to improve in Oratory. . . ."<sup>33</sup> Euphradian officers included a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, recorder, and four critics. At regular meetings the Euphradians followed a ten-step order of business:

1st The calling the first Roll. 2nd The performance of the first orator. 3rd The reading of the minutes and initiation of members. 5th The ordinary debates and remarks of the critics on each debate. 6th The proposition and consideration of meetings. 7th The announcing the regular exercises for that day fortnight and reading over those for that day week. 8th The report of the Secretary and Treasurer and the reports and general remarks of the Critics. 9th The performance of the last Orator. 10th The calling of the last Roll.<sup>34</sup>

The "ordinary debates," staples of Euphradian activity, consisted of two, or occasionally three, debates, with two-member teams speaking on each side of the chosen propositions. A clear-cut and detailed body of rules governed these debates. No member was allowed to speak "oftener then twice, & in, his reply, shall be limited to 15 minutes." Also, the President was given the prerogative of summing up the arguments and submitting his opinion. To the Society, however, was granted the right to "determine the question." Furthermore, it was provided that "If a debate, should fall through, any two members, wishing to discuss it may call for, it, any time previous, to the

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<sup>33</sup>Euphradian Society Constitution, 1806-1941.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

introduction, of motions." Finally, the Constitution provided that "Any two members wishing to discuss any debate, which they may select, shall be allowed, to, discuss the same, after the ordinary debates of the evening."<sup>35</sup>

To the crowded agenda of the Euphradian Society were added monthly orations, as well as anniversary and senior valedictory addresses. The Constitution stipulated that the valedictory orator was to be elected from the senior class, and the anniversary orator from the junior class. Specific times were appointed for the delivery of these orations. The valedictory was presented before the Society at "6 p.m., on the Tuesday, before Commencement." At the same hour on "the third Friday, of, December," the anniversary oration was delivered. The monthly orations were also presented by members chosen from the junior and senior classes.<sup>36</sup>

Because the minutes of the Euphradian Society covering the period from 1806 to 1823 are not extant, save for some fragments for the years 1815 and 1816, it is not known precisely what debate propositions engaged the energies of the Euphradians. Nevertheless, since the activities of the two societies were similar in all respects, it can be assumed that the Euphradians, like the Clariosophics, debated political, as well as religious and historical propositions.<sup>37</sup> The following illustrative examples from the Euphradian minutes for the year 1815 are suggestive of the character of the debate questions for the period.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Hollis, South Carolina College, I, 235.

Ought the education of the female be as much attended to as that of the male?

Are the allied powers justifiable in maintaining the Bourbons on the throne of France without consulting the constitutional authority of the people?

Is it probable that Bonaparte will ever reascend the throne of France?<sup>38</sup>

Through participation in the activities of the Euphradian Society, Preston was able to augment to a considerable degree the program of practical training afforded by the regular curriculum. Throughout his long and busy life, he maintained a lively interest and a strong faith in his old Society. During the period of his presidency of South Carolina College (1846-1851), he attended the meetings of the Euphradians when time and health permitted, participating frequently in the Society's discussions. Even in his twilight years, "decrepit and paralyzed, he hobbled up the steps of the hall to attend its meetings."<sup>39</sup>

In short, rhetorical study and practice highlighted Preston's

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<sup>38</sup>Minutes of the Euphradian Society, November 12, 19, 1815.

<sup>39</sup>The close identification which Preston maintained with the Euphradian Society is evidenced in the resolutions passed by the Society at a called meeting, May 26, 1860, four days after Preston's death.

"Resolved, That the Euphradian Society in the death of the Hon. William C. Preston has lost a friend, a patron, and a benefactor; one who has ever cherished an abiding interest in her welfare, whether surrounded by the bustle and turmoil of a political life, or in the evening of his existence, when disease and old age had bent his noble form.

"Resolved, That she has lost a noble, highminded and affectionate son, one who has reflected the greatest honor upon our society, our State and our country at large; one whose mellifluous eloquence, polished and varied scholarship, kind and courteous bearing, and noble Christian spirit are worthy of the highest admiration of all who would aspire to be great and good." Minutes of the Euphradian Society, May 26, 1860.

years at South Carolina College, where it was believed that "whatever the test in other lands, here a man must speak and speak well if he expects to acquire and maintain a permanent influence in society."<sup>40</sup> While at the feet of Maxcy, Preston became acquainted with three significant rhetorical treatises, he was able, also, through a regimen of practice, curricular as well as extra curricular, to continue the cultivation of rhetorical skills. That the program of speech training served to improve his speaking abilities is evident from his own statement, "I had a considerable reputation for speaking, and that was the principal source of reputation at that time."<sup>41</sup> John B. O'Neill, one of Preston's college classmates, declared:

Preston was then [1811] remarkable as an extemporaneous speaker. I have heard him in college, at the Bar, in the State Legislature, and on many other occasions during his public life, and I confess, as to mere oratory, I think he was, in college boyhood, as perfect a speaker as he was in after life. He afterward acquired more knowledge, more powers of argumentation, but he never exceeded himself in his youthful displays of eloquent declamation. He was an orator by nature; the subsequent additions of art did not add to his brilliancy; they often marred his otherwise matchless declamation.<sup>42</sup>

Likewise, B. F. Perry wrote that Preston's "reputation for talents and eloquence in [South Carolina] college was unequalled."<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps Preston's overall scholastic accomplishment in College

<sup>40</sup>James H. Thornwell, quoted in Hollis, South Carolina College, I, 230.

<sup>41</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 5.

<sup>42</sup>John B. O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, 2 vols. (Charleston, 1859), II, 331-332.

<sup>43</sup>Benjamin F. Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1883), II, 58.



did not keep pace with his growth in speech skills. Despite Perry's remark that Preston "was regarded as the most brilliant young man who had ever entered that institution," available evidence--scant though it is--indicates that Preston's scholastic record was not the most brilliant.<sup>44</sup> While Preston recorded, "In college I took and maintained a good stand,"<sup>45</sup> to Henry Finckney and John B. O'Neill were awarded the highest honors of Preston's graduating class.

Preston's admission to South Carolina College as a sophomore meant that he had not only met the requirements for admission to the freshman class, but that he also passed the examination on the subjects of the freshman year. Admission to the freshman class assumed a grounding in Latin and Greek. The Latin requirement was "to render from Latin into English, Cornelius Nepos, Sallust, Caesar's Commentaries, Virgil's Aeneid, and also make grammatical Latin from the exercises in Mair's Introduction." In Greek, the candidate for admission had "to turn into English any passage from the Evangelist St. John, in the Greek Testament."

The would-be freshman also had to have a good general knowledge of English grammar, write a good, legible hand, spell correctly, and be well acquainted with arithmetic, as far as the rule of proportion.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>The only available evidence of Preston's academic achievement is found in an undated manuscript record of the sophomore class, which shows Preston's average in one class to have been 72 per cent, with 97 per cent representing the highest average, 52 per cent the lowest. Miscellaneous Records of the South Carolina College, MSS, Caroliniana Library.

<sup>45</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 5.

<sup>46</sup>Hollis, South Carolina College, 31. While these qualifications seem admirable enough, there is evidence that actual admission standards were less than rigorous and that examinations were on occasion perfunctorily administered.



The freshman subjects on which Preston was examined were "Vulgar and decimal fractions," arithmetic, Sheridan's Lectures on Elocution, and "Roman Antiquities."<sup>47</sup>

Thus prepared, Preston attacked the subjects of the sophomore class. Within a few weeks he had made a satisfactory orientation to campus life. To Samuel Reid, a classmate at Washington Academy, he wrote:

I am well enough acquainted to know that the manner of living /in this/ college is much more comfortable than at Lexington and the duties much harder. I am in the Sophomore Class which recites three times a day from which you may suppose that the hours of recitation and leisure are but few.<sup>48</sup>

While at South Carolina College, Preston was under the tutelage of a small corps of capable instructors, chiefly men trained in New England. Just as the College had imported its curriculum from New England, it also looked to the same region for the bulk of its faculty. Five of the six professors were Preston's teachers. Thomas Park, professor of languages, who joined the faculty in 1808, was a product of Brown University.<sup>49</sup> In the opinion of La Borde, Park was a man of "capital sense." While there was "nothing brilliant . . . in the character of his intellect," Park was "painstaking, and conscientious, and could make scholars of those who were rightly disposed."<sup>50</sup> George

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>48</sup>Preston to Samuel Reid, Columbia, S. C., February 3, 1810, William Campbell Preston Papers, Caroliniana Library.

<sup>49</sup>Hollis, South Carolina College, I, 39.

<sup>50</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 180-181.

Blackburn, professor of mathematics and astronomy, was elected to replace Paul Ferrault in 1811, as Preston began his junior year.<sup>51</sup> An "able mathematician, and most excellent instructor," Blackburn remained only three years with the College, tendering his resignation in 1815, after certain altercations with De Saussure's standing committee.<sup>52</sup> Under John Brown, Preston studied logic and moral philosophy. Brown, who joined the faculty in 1809, was a Presbyterian minister from the district of Lancaster.<sup>53</sup> Known to his colleagues as "Apostle John," he has been described as "An eminently good man, . . . animated by a truly apostolic spirit."<sup>54</sup> Preston's study of French in his sophomore year was under Paul Ferrault, "a Frenchman," who was removed by Maxcy in 1811 "for neglect of College duties." An able teacher of French, Ferrault was also "well skilled in mathematical science."<sup>55</sup>

Still another educational opportunity at South Carolina was afforded by good library resources. The College Library, which was "particularly rich in its classical collection, in literature at large, and in history, ancient and modern," contained 9,000 volumes.<sup>56</sup> Maxcy was not one to rest instruction merely upon classroom texts. Accordingly, he drew up an extensive collateral reading list in "sacred and

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 436.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 80; Hollis, South Carolina College, 57, 58, 63.

<sup>53</sup>Hollis, South Carolina College, 43.

<sup>54</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 80-81.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>56</sup>Mary S. Legare (ed.), Legare's Works, 2 vols. (Charleston, 1846), I, xxiii.

profane history" for the hundred-odd students of the College. Preserved in the Charleston Library Society manuscripts division, this list includes around five hundred books, "covering every phase and every recorded detail of ancient, medieval, and a great deal of modern history."<sup>57</sup> Many of the works listed were written in foreign languages. Doubtless, however, Maxcy did not expect the students to read these in the original, since he believed that little attention should be devoted to the study of "a foreign or dead language." It was Maxcy's contention that "the best in history" could be had from good translations.<sup>58</sup>

Also, at South Carolina College, though the "hours of leisure were but few," many students were not disposed to spend all their time in study. As the minutes of the Faculty indicate, Maxcy and his staff were frequently beset with disciplinary problems during the years 1810-1812. The sheets of the minutes book for these years are bespattered with recordings of such offences as "stealing turkeys," "molesting Columbia citizens," and "entering the house of an infamous mulatto," and in the case of one student, "brandishing a pistol in defense of property not his own."<sup>59</sup> To Samuel Reid, young Preston wrote that the majority of the students were "extremely moral and orderly," yet, "they sometimes 'break the shackles of restraint and

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<sup>57</sup>Hungerpiller, "A Sketch of the Life and Character of Jonathan Maxcy," loc. cit., 27.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Minutes of the Faculty, December, 1810 to December, 1812. See, also, Hollis, South Carolina College, 55-59.

rise to the madness of their power.' They sometimes turn a Methodist congregation out of the church and fill it with goats, and they sometimes make a little noise in the stewards [sic] house."<sup>60</sup> While Preston was not altogether an ascetic, he appears to have been decorous in behavior, for his name does not appear among the lists of culprits. Yet in later life he felt that slackness of discipline impeded the progress of learning at the College, for he wrote that "the state of discipline . . . at that time was not much calculated to confer a high education."<sup>61</sup>

Preston's final examinations began on October 21, 1812, "in presence of the Faculty and a number of literary gentlemen. . . ."<sup>62</sup> Successful in all of them, he was, accordingly, on October 26, recommended by the faculty as a candidate for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, together with twenty-four other "young gentlemen."<sup>63</sup> Preston was also among the six students assigned to deliver commencement orations. Along with Whitfield Brooks, James Massey, and Arthur O'Hara, he was designated an "intermediate orator," to follow on the commencement program the valedictory and the salutatory, which were assigned respectively to Henry L. Pinckney and John B. O'Neill.<sup>64</sup>

Preston's speech training at Columbia thus culminated in his

<sup>60</sup>Preston to Samuel Reid, Columbia, S. C., February 3, 1810, William Campbell Preston Papers.

<sup>61</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 5.

<sup>62</sup>Minutes of the Faculty, October 21, 1812.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., October 26, 1812.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

commencement oration, which he entitled, "The life and character of Jefferson." The subject was a timely one, for as La Borde noted, "It was a time of much political excitement between the Federalists and the Republicans. . . ." <sup>65</sup> In the presentation of his oration, Preston acquitted himself well. La Borde wrote, "As his elocution was far above the common standard, the speech was well received, and, as was thought, shadowed forth his future reputation." <sup>66</sup>

Upon graduation from South Carolina College, Preston stood at another milestone of intellectual development. At eighteen years of age, he had already manifested many of the abilities and attributes of personality and character that augured for a successful public role in his times. One characterization of him is given by Mary Legare, sister of Hugh S. Legare.

He possessed the hereditary gift of eloquence, and . . . the abilities for a high public part. These were set off by great advantages of manner and person, a natural charm of speech the most striking . . . , a personal bearing singularly winning, honor, fidelity, political probity, public aims all elevated and generous. <sup>67</sup>

Between Preston's graduation at Columbia and his admission to the Virginia bar in 1820, however, lay numerous and varied experiences which would both deepen and broaden his preparation for a career of law and politics. Further general reading lay ahead of him, as well as specialized study in the field of law. Moreover, the fulfillment of a part of his father's "plan of education" would yield to him the

<sup>65</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 285.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 285.

<sup>67</sup>Legare, Legare's Works, I, xxxv.

cultural advantages of a period of extensive travel in America and abroad.



## CHAPTER IV

### GRAND TOUR

Preston's contemporaries were generally agreed that he was an orator of unusually fine personal resources. B. F. Perry believed, for example, that "There have been few public men who possessed such a combination of high endowments, noble qualities and rare accomplishments as Colonel William C. Preston."<sup>1</sup> Rion, another contemporary, testified that Preston "seemed to have an intuitive perception of the beautiful--was thoroughly conversant with literature, and at the same time, a great orator and consummate actor."<sup>2</sup> Of especial significance is the commentary on Preston's intellectual stock, which indicates that his contemporaries believed him a person possessing not only a broad academic training, but also a "large" practical experience.<sup>3</sup>

Preston's intellectual resources and his development as a speaker were considerably influenced, as has been noted, by his early home environment, education and training, associates, and experiences. Likewise, the final phase of his education, which followed his graduation from South Carolina College, contained numerous experiences which enriched his intellectual stock and further stimulated and

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<sup>1</sup>Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men, II, 56.

<sup>2</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 4.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, La Borte, History of the South Carolina College, 292-295.

shaped his development as an effective speaker.

Francis Smith Preston insisted on adding refinements to his blueprint for William's education. The Virginia legislature, in session when Preston returned home from his graduation at Columbia, afforded an excellent opportunity for him to observe the legislative process in action, and to meet some of the leading figures of his home state. Accordingly, his father called him to Richmond where he met a number of leading Virginia jurists and politicians, among whom were Benjamin Watkins Leigh, A. P. Upshur, Matthew Stephenson, and John Wickham. Preston also made the acquaintance of two notables in other fields of endeavor, namely, Moses Hoge of Hanover Presbytery, a preacher, and William Edward West, a famous artist.<sup>4</sup>

From the Virginia capital, Preston's father sent him next to the nation's capital, where he spent the remainder of the winter as a guest of President James Madison. "Being a kinsman of Mrs. Madison," Preston wrote, "and my father having been a colleague and intimate friend of Mr. Madison, I was domesticated by them in the President's house and there met with whatever was curious or conspicuous in the City." Dolly Madison, who called Preston "her own boy," treated the young sojourner "with cordiality and even affection," and the President treated him "with a kindness beyond his usual wont. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

It was no accident that Preston's stay in the nation's capital coincided with the waning months of the famous "War Congress," which

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<sup>4</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 6.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

included such notables as Henry Clay and George Bibb of Kentucky, and John C. Calhoun, Langdon Cheves, and William Lowndes of South Carolina. By virtue of his associations in the Madison household, Preston was "thrown a good deal amongst these men." Also, he availed himself of the opportunity to visit frequently the halls of Congress, where he listened with high interest to the oratory of a number of the "War Hawks."<sup>6</sup> It is significant that with two of them, Clay and Calhoun, Preston was later to serve in the United States Senate.

Preston's seat at the presidential board gave him a fascinating--though not always pleasant--behind-the-scenes view of men and manners in the executive mansion. Obviously agreeable to his patrician tastes was the social atmosphere of dignity and easy grace which characterized the drawing rooms and dinners of the charming first lady. For Dolly Madison, Preston could find only praise. He believed that "the lofty and noble courtesy of her social life, was not less inborn and engrafted in her nature than the undeviating good temper and amity of her private life." She was indeed, "a fit wife for a President, adorning the high circle over which it was her lot to preside and sweetening and soothing" the President's "private hours." Madison, however, was "cold and stiff" in manners, unless under the influence of wine. Moreover, the jibes of political opponents "was a source of daily annoyance and vexation to him, exciting him to petulance and querulousness."<sup>7</sup> Besides the President and the first lady,

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 6-8. Preston expressed in forthright terms his disgust for the "habitual snit" that characterized Madison's casual conversation, as well as the conversations of "all the gentlemen of that

the Madison household embraced "cousins and friends innumerable, and of political adherents an ample contingent."<sup>8</sup> Preston centered his attentions upon Miss Sally Coles, a Virginia cousin of Mrs. Madison, and Miss Maria Mayo, a fashionable Richmond belle.<sup>9</sup> In the company of these two young women, Preston gamboled through the gay Washington social world of brilliant uniforms, gay toilettes, stiff brocade, and gold snuff boxes. "The season was gay," Preston wrote, "and I very fully participated in it." He "had got enough of this sort of life" by the end of the winter, however, and his father took him home "to rusticate for a short time."<sup>10</sup>

In the fall of 1813, Preston's father entered him in the law office of William Wirt, the distinguished Richmond jurist. This action was accomplished, Preston wrote, in order that "I might take one other step in the education . . . proposed for me."<sup>11</sup> To Francis Smith Preston's mind, the office of William Wirt was the ideal one for the initiation of young Preston's law education. Wirt was regarded as one of the ablest members of the Virginia bar. "The members of that bar," Farrington wrote, "were gentlemen as well as lawyers, who

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generation." There was only one exception. "Of all the men I have known familiarly, Calhoun was the only one whose conversation was uncontaminated by such impurity."

<sup>8</sup>Anna H. Wharton, Social Life in the Early Republic (Philadelphia, 1902), 142.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 139-141.

<sup>10</sup>Farberough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 9.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 10.

would rather go wrong in their legal authorities than in their classical embellishments; they were orators as well, careful of their diction and meticulous in rounding a period." Wirt, "bred in the classics, English Literature, and the common law," was "an excellent lawyer, with a knack for formal oratory."<sup>12</sup> One contemporary, writing under the pseudonym of "Justitia," declared Wirt had never been surpassed "by any competitor in the force with which he brought forward the points of his [legal] argument, and in the lucid order of his arrangement. . . ." The same critic regarded Wirt also as "not less strong in argument than he was brilliant and felicitous in language and illustration."<sup>13</sup>

Preston seems not to have availed himself fully of the advantages offered by Wirt's office. Certainly his application to Blackstone hardly justified his father's expectations. As Preston recorded, much of his time was sacrificed to merriment and marrowless pursuits, in the company of a group of riotous "young Virginia gentlemen." "We lived fast," wrote Preston, "were much addicted to cards, and had an increasing round of gaiety, in short were persons of 'wit and pleasure about town,' holding in utter scorn all sedate pursuits or grave occupations." This sojourn in Richmond he later recalled

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<sup>12</sup>Vernon Lewis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, 3 vols. (New York, 1927), II, 32.

<sup>13</sup>Quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, May 8, 1835. Interestingly, Wirt's biography of Patrick Henry, Preston's grand uncle, was in preparation during the time of Preston's stay in Richmond. The biography was published in 1817, four years later, under the title, Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry.

"with shame and regret."<sup>14</sup>

Preston's father "never relinquished" his plan to have his eldest son's education finished by a period of travel and study in Europe. He reasoned, however, that Preston should first become acquainted with his own country. Accordingly, with "a pair of horses and a servant," Preston began a four-thousand-mile tour of the American frontier in the Spring of 1816. The horseback tour, accomplished in something less than five months, took him through Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. "The ride," Preston declared, "was solitary, thro forests and prairies."<sup>15</sup>

In Kentucky, Preston met "all the principal families," most of whom "were variously connected" with his own. Significantly, however, Preston felt that these old Virginia families had experienced "a certain loss of civilization" through the influence of the harsh physical environment of the frontier. He wrote: "Amongst persons of my own age, who were native to the state, there was a self-dependence not to say self-assertion, and ostentatious suppression of the smaller courtesies of life and minute observations of convention, which was not pleasant."<sup>16</sup>

In Indiana and Illinois, Preston found "society had not begun to be organized." He noted the small "enclosures half field and half patch," the hardships endured by the frontier women, the steady supplies of venison and turkey which poured into the family larders,

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<sup>14</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 10.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 11-12.



and the "scanty room" in the log dwellings. Traveling a bit more luxuriously than others, Preston provided himself with an "Indian bred" pack pony which bore his clothes, "a little bread," and "several buffalo robes." Some nights he spent in the open, wrapped in a buffalo robe. Occasionally, however, he was able to secure lodging in the home of a hospitable settler. Other travellers, among them circuit-riding preachers, whom Preston chanced to meet, helped to break the heavy monotony of wearying horseback travel.<sup>17</sup>

After some months, Preston reached St. Louis, where he crossed the Mississippi on a canoe raft. He found St. Louis flooded with immigrants. So meager were lodging facilities that Preston was able to manage only "a corner" in "the room of a printing press." But from these quarters he was "extricated" the following day by William Clark, who was then Governor of the Missouri Territory. Two years before Preston's visit, Clark had retired to St. Louis after leading a group of "about fifty regulars and three times as many volunteers" on an expedition to Prairie du Chien at the mouth of the Wisconsin River. At St. Louis he released his volunteers, and devoted his time to reconciling the western Indians "by a series of treaties."<sup>18</sup>

During his stay of several weeks in the "elegant quarters" of Governor Clark, Preston found himself "most delightfully situated." Clark was daily occupied with Indian affairs. He received delegations of chiefs in his home, held councils with them, sent messages to the

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>18</sup>Malone (ed.), Dictionary of American Biography, IV, 143-144.

numerous tribes, and appointed Indian agents. Preston was an engrossed spectator at the strange gatherings of the Mandoes, Miamis, Osages, Sacs, and Foxas, all of which were held in Clark's quarters.<sup>19</sup> Especially engaging to him was the Indian oratory of the lesser as well as of the grand councils which he attended. He noted the stateliness of the Indian speakers' bearing, their "dignified and deliberate" gestures, and their deliberate rate of utterance.<sup>20</sup>

After a sojourn of several weeks at Governor Clark's residence, Preston returned to Virginia by way of Indiana and Ohio. Assessing the values of the journey, he wrote, "It gave occasion for much musing and reveries, not as I think unimportant circumstances in the education of a youth, while my body was hardened by the exercise and exposure and my mind habituated to self dependence."<sup>21</sup> Upon his return to Abingdon, Virginia, where his father had recently established a new residence, Preston was urged to begin a period of general reading. His father's injunction was, "'Spend the winter as diligently reading as you have the summer riding and in the spring you will be fit to go to Europe.'"<sup>22</sup>

For Preston's projected tour of Europe, his father procured "as many letters of introduction as he could get," among which were letters from Thomas Jefferson, and Abbe Corves, the Portuguese Minister.

<sup>19</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 16-20.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid. Preston included in his account of these Councils, the fragmentary texts of certain speeches of Indian Chiefs, which, he said, he remembered "for many years," and repeated to his friends.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted, ibid., 21.

In February, 1817, Preston went to Washington in order to obtain letters from various members of Congress, and from the newly-elected President, James Monroe. On the day of his inauguration, Monroe took time to write two letters for Preston, which later proved of "special importance." One, written to Monroe's friend, Lord Holland, commended Preston "as a friend who was seated beside him at the table as he wrote. . . ." The other, a "general letter," presented him to "all Officers of the Government in foreign Countries."<sup>23</sup>

Thus armed with "piles of letters" to notables, English merchants, and "men of business," Preston set sail for England in May, 1817, on the Quaker ship Amite. "The passengers were numerous, of all countries and entirely uninteresting. I don't believe I remember the name of one," Preston wrote. After a "slow and tedious" voyage of thirty days, the Amite eased into the emerald harbor at the Cove of Cork on the Irish Coast, where Preston, "with his usual impetuosity," hurried ashore in a small boat, leaving his baggage to be brought to the shore by the Amite.<sup>24</sup>

Preston proceeded first to Dublin by coach, where he had "no acquaintances, and no letters to make any as it had not been in the project of . . . [his] route." The "beggary and want" he witnessed along the roads drew from his pockets all the coin in his possession. Fortunately, however, he met Edward Coles, an American acquaintance, who furnished him money as well as letters of introduction. While in

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>24</sup>Virginia P. Carrington, quoted in Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 137.

Dublin Preston attended the theatres, hearing on one occasion Maurice John Braham, a noted English singer. Also, some hours were spent in the various reading rooms of Dublin. But his most noteworthy experience was occasioned by an introduction to Hamilton Rowan, one of the victims of the Irish state trials. "While I looked at him and talked with him," declared Preston, "I was all the while thinking of [Philpot] Curran's speech, which at that time I knew entirely by heart."<sup>25</sup> In Dublin Preston also met Lady Morgan, author of The Wild Irish Girl. Disappointed in the Irish author, whom he had pictured as Glorvina, the airy heroine of the book, Preston beheld "a fat, red-checked, cock-eyed lady," of "coarse" manners, but of warm heart. Before leaving Dublin, Preston found time to visit the famous Irish Four Courts, where he examined with zest the texture of Irish judicial oratory. Attending him was Hamilton Rowan, who pointed out various able Irish pleaders among the throngs of "wigs and black gowns" that crowded the halls.<sup>26</sup>

Deciding to conserve his finances, Preston terminated his stay in Dublin much sooner than he had intended, and proceeded by packet ship to Holyhead, England. Because of his large-hearted giving to the "prodigious and squalid" crowd of Irish laborers that jammed the decks of the packet ship, he landed in Holyhead with but "two and

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 29. Perhaps the most widely known of the addresses of Curran (1750-1817), the Irish politician and orator, is his "Speech in Defense of Hamilton Rowan." This particular speech, delivered January 29, 1794, was one of the few of Curran to be fully reported. For the complete text, see James A. L. Whittier (ed.), Speeches of John Philpot Curran, While at the Bar (Chicago, 1877), 27-85. For a special study of Curran's oratory, see Claude G. Bowers, The Irish Orators: A History of Ireland's Fight for Freedom (Indianapolis, 1916), 127-167.

<sup>26</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 30.

sixpence" in his pocket. Traveling on the outside of a coach from Holyhead to Liverpool, he became soaked by rain, and upon his arrival at the Kings Arms in Liverpool was "delirious" with a fever.<sup>27</sup>

At the Kings Arms Preston met Washington Irving, who was also making a tour of England. When his "delirium" lifted, Preston saw standing by his bedside "a small gentleman dressed in black," who said to him, "'I am your countryman, Washington Irving.'" The author then proceeded to explain to the bewildered Preston that the United States Consul had given him private lodging after discovering in his trunk the letter of introduction from Thomas Jefferson. Thus began the friendship with Irving which became for Preston one of the most cherished and rewarding of his long life.<sup>28</sup>

As he convalesced, Preston enjoyed daily visits from Irving, who extended to him "tenderness and attention." He saw the author as "a man of grave, indeed a melancholy aspect, of very staid manners, his kindness rather the offspring of principle and cultivated taste than of emotion." "There was an unfailing air of moderation about him," Preston further noted, "his dress was punctilious, his tone of talking, soft and firm, and in general ever subdued. . . ."<sup>29</sup>

After the acquaintance had "ripened into some degree of intimacy,"

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 31-32. Stanley T. Williams, an Irving biographer, declares that Preston's Reminiscences shows Irving more clearly "during this uncertain period" than any other document. Stanley T. Williams, The Life of Washington Irving, 2 vols. (New York, 1935), I, 163.



Irving, who had "a great deal of the English reticence," assigned himself the task of "restraining the exuberance" of Preston's "national and natural temper." Irving, Preston's senior by eleven years, was "eminently fit" to supervise the young American's manners, which lacked, thought Irving, the characteristics of "propriety, fitness, and retention." Irving was free in his "animadversions"; Preston was equally free in vindicating himself, arguing that his own traits were "nationalities." "They are wrong nationalities," Irving insisted, "and ought to be suppressed in a gentleman." One object of travel, moreover, was the removal of such personality taints. Some of these discussions generated great warmth, and Preston was loath to accede Irving's point. But the author "soon became cool," and upon subsequent reflection his young companion "saw much truth in what he said." Yet it was Preston's opinion that Irving's Anglophile tendency was of such strength as to cause him to push "his opposition to . . . [Americanizing]" to the extent almost of affection.<sup>30</sup>

The strange friendship of the vigorous, buoyant Preston, and the restrained, almost somber, Irving, was quickly cemented, and Irving took Preston into close companionship. To Preston, Irving confided not only "the disastrous condition of his pecuniary circumstances," but also his decision that "literature was to be his profession and the means of support." Preston now had the benefit of Irving's mature counsel to replace that of his father, Francis Preston.

To Irving, writing had hitherto been an amusement; now it was

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<sup>30</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 34.



a grave business. Eager to get at significant materials for his first serious venture, The Sketch Book, he suggested to Preston that his proposed European tour be postponed, and that the two of them, with Irving's brother, Peter, "make a pedestrian excursion into Wales en attendant." Preston was disposed to follow his companion's advice, since Irving argued cogently that the European tour could be executed with greater ease after making a fuller acquaintance of Britain. On June 23, the trio left Liverpool to begin their walking tour of Wales. "Our wardrobe," Preston wrote, "consisted of two shirts made of linen cambric, compressible into so small a space that they with a pair of silk socks were put into the crown of our hats." At Wrexham, Preston feasted his eyes on "the first piece of high art" he had ever seen-- "an exquisite piece of sculpture" by the French artist, Louis Francois Roubillac.<sup>31</sup>

Though reared in the mountains of Virginia, where his favorite diversion was deer hunting, Preston found the pedestrian excursion particularly trying. "The trip taught me," he wrote, "that though mountain-bred and accustomed all my life to hunting on foot, I was inferior as a walker to the city-bred Irvings." Preston's "broken down feet" compelled the travelers to proceed at a much slower pace than was Irving's desire. Also, Irving experienced no little difficulty in arousing Preston "from his lair at six o'clock in the morning."<sup>32</sup>

With his American companions, Preston "made frequent visits

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>32</sup>Quoted in Pierre M. Irving (ed.), Life and Letters of Washington Irving, 3 vols. (New York, 1869), I, 289.

to Halton Castle at the village of Runcorn . . . above Liverpool." At Runcorn, Preston's interest in the picturesque rural landscape and crumbling castles was hardly more acute than his curiosity about the contents of "an old library," presided over by the parish priest.<sup>33</sup> With avidity he thumbed for hours the tiny quartos, which he discovered "antiquated, not often disturbed." He was reluctant to leave the misty domain of the Irish priest, which, to him was the highlight of his trip to the little riverport of Runcorn.<sup>34</sup>

With the Irvings, Preston next visited Valle-Crucis and Holywell, and, finally, as Preston wrote, "having rummaged Wales pretty well," the party returned to Liverpool. Preston was now bent upon an immediate departure for London, but Irving easily dissuaded him. "Your letters to London will keep," argued Irving. . . . Go there in the winter. Take the fine season in the country. Let us go to Scotland." Even stronger than these arguments was Preston's desire to have a look at the land of Burns and Scott. Familiar with the works of both authors, he had the deepest admiration for them. Scott, he believed, was more "minute and accurate" in his portrayal of nature than any writer since Homer; Burns, he felt, was "the greatest British poet since Shakespeare."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 36.

<sup>34</sup>For Irving's account of the excursion to Runcorn, see Stanley Williams (ed.), Irving's Tour in Scotland, 1817, and Other Manuscript Notes (New Haven, Conn., 1927). Under date of June 23, 1817, Irving entered the following terse notation in his notebook (p. 79): "Attempt to visit the library but key is denied by curates [sic] wife--great indignation of Preston. . . . In the afternoon visit the Library. . . ."

<sup>35</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 42.

Despite the difficulty Preston experienced in walking, he agreed to Irving's suggestion, and the travelers began preparations for the excursion, which, it was decided, would begin in September. Meanwhile, there were weeks in which to explore Liverpool and its environs. Accordingly, Preston and his companions made various expeditions into the "Western and Central counties" of England "to many places of interest, for historic association, manufacturing activity, or beauty of scenery. . . ." They visited Sheffield, Preston, Manchester, Stratford-on-Avon, and Oxford, "loitered a day in and about Warwick castle," and caught glimpses of Kenilworth, Woodstock, and Blenheim.<sup>36</sup>

At length the time came for the excursion into the Highlands. After a hurried trip through London and York, Preston reached Edinburgh, where Washington Irving was awaiting his arrival.<sup>37</sup> Some days were first spent in the society of the Scottish capital where one prominent Scot predicted that Preston, now twenty-three, would "be heard of as an ornament of that great continent [America] . . . such light of mind--such perfect good nature!"<sup>38</sup>

Now without the company of Peter Irving, Preston and his

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Williams (ed.), Irving's Tour of Scotland, 1817, 10. This work contains, in addition to the two Irving journals, the complete itinerary of the travelers, with dates of arrivals and departures.

<sup>38</sup>James Grant (ed.), Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs. Grant of Laggan, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1844), II, 228. Among the literary works of Mrs. Anne Grant, the Scottish author, are Original Poems (1802), Letters From the Mountains (1803), and Memoirs of an American Lady (1808).

traveling companion mounted a chaise on September 7, for "Stirling and the highlands."<sup>39</sup> Fully intending to "essay the highlands afoot," they began their first walk at Stirling. But at Linlithgow Preston could no longer proceed on his swollen feet.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, he hired "a sort of large gig drawn by one horse in shafts, capable of holding two persons besides a small driver on a sort of stool in the front." In this fashion the travelers visited Branockburn and Perth, at the latter place discharging their young driver.<sup>41</sup>

Determined to make a careful scrutiny of the Scott country, they decided to take for their itinerary the first canto of The Lady of the Lake. While they carried with them a copy of Scott's poem, "the book was hardly necessary," Preston wrote, "for we knew the poem by heart." Following "the course of the stag," Preston and Irving made their way cautiously around the most "precipitous ascents." Upon reaching the Lake, the imaginative Preston fancied he could see "the lady of the Lake in her light shalop."<sup>42</sup> Pausing briefly at Rob Roy's

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<sup>39</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 43. For Irving's account of the Scottish tour, see Williams (ed.), Irving's Tour in Scotland, 1817. One of the two manuscript journals comprising this work was titled by Irving: "1817 miscellaneous notes during a tour in Scotland with Wm. C. Preston." Both journals are the property of Preston Davie of Tuxedo Park, New York City, a kinsman of William C. Preston.

<sup>40</sup>To his brother Irving wrote in humorous vein of Preston's shortcomings as a traveler: "The journey has been a complete trial of Preston's indolent habits. . . . The early part of the route he complained sadly, and fretted occasionally, but as he proceeded, he grew into condition and spirits, went through the latter part in fine style, and I brought him into Edinburgh in perfect order for the turf." Quoted in Irving (ed.), Life and Letters of Washington Irving, I, 289.

<sup>41</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 44.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 46-48.

cave, the travelers proceeded to Greenoc and Glasgow, thence to "the land of Burns, to Auld Ayre, which were a town surpasses for honest men and bonny lasses." On the Coast of Ayreshire, Preston discovered "the most beautiful sunsets" he had ever seen.<sup>43</sup>

Preston's "perfect good nature," together with his love for literature, made him an ideal traveling companion for Irving. "[H<sub>2</sub>]" never broke in upon the author's sacred reveries concerning Scott and Burns, and he had a flair for the humorous side of hardship and for anecdotes of his Carolinian [sic] frontier.<sup>44</sup> Besides, Preston proved an ideal sounding board for certain important literary ideas that were taking form in Irving's mind. The Sketch Book was in its pre-natal state as the travelers rummaged Burns and Scott country. Irving mentioned to Preston frequently his notion of the proposed work. "He turned it in his mind," says Preston, "spoke a good deal to me about it--occasionally asked me when he gave an account of anything that touched him, how that would do in print."<sup>45</sup>

Doubtless, too, Preston's propensity for hiring carriages and sleeping late were in some measure compensated for by his dexterity in shaping evocative analogies which appealed to Irving's fancy, and found place in the author's jottings. Scattered through Irving's journals are such notations as, "Prestons comparison of Steel traps &c amid lovely scenery to the tounge [sic] of an adder under a rose bush."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>44</sup>Williams (ed.), The Life of Washington Irving, I, 163.

<sup>45</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 36.

<sup>46</sup>Williams (ed.), Irving's Tour in Scotland, 1817, 77.



"Prestons comparison of the whirl of indistinct ideas of men in a city--opticians say that distribute colours separately on a wheel & whirl it round--it produces no colour--so the constant whirl of sensation produces no thought."<sup>47</sup>

Apparently, Preston and Irving parted in Liverpool. Irving left Scotland earlier than he had expected, as he wrote to Peter Irving, "for the purpose of having Preston's company" a few days longer. "I shall bring . . . [Preston] to Liverpool [from Edinburgh], and then send him on by South Wales to London," Irving continued.<sup>48</sup> Both left in high spirits, expecting to meet Scott en route to Liverpool. In the same letter, Irving wrote, "We go to Selkirk to-night and tomorrow shall pay Scott a visit." Unfortunately the famous novelist was absent from Abbotsford when the travelers made their visit. After Preston returned to Edinburgh to study a few months later, Irving wrote him a letter of introduction to Scott, "who took a great liking to him and entertained him frequently."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>48</sup>Irving (ed.), Life and Letters of Washington Irving, I, 386.

<sup>49</sup>The friendship between Irving and Preston was one of the most enduring and satisfying of Preston's life. After 1817, the two did not meet again until 1832, when Irving spent a day with Preston in Columbia, where they reminisced at length. Their last reunion occurred on March 17, 1842, in Washington, where Irving dined with his old friend, who was then a United States Senator. They continued to correspond, however, until Irving's death in 1859. Preston outlived Irving "by a few months only, dying in 1860 on the eve of the Civil War." "In the last letters they exchanged Preston and Irving expressed a tender regard for each other and dwelt upon their holiday expeditions of the long ago." Minnie C. Yarborough, "Rambles With Washington Irving," South Atlantic Quarterly XXIX (October, 1930), 437-439; Williams, Irving's Tour in Scotland, 1817, 127; Irving, Life and Letters of Washington Irving, IV, 288; Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 139-140.



At London Preston met Andrew Govan, an old "College mate," who accompanied him on his trip to the Continent.<sup>50</sup> Upon their arrival in Calais, the two immediately began to polish up their rusty French, engaging in conversation with every Frenchman "willing to talk. . . ."<sup>51</sup> Moving on to Paris, Preston met other American tourists, among whom were his "friend and kinsman, James Brown, a United States Senator from Louisiana, and Hugh S. Legare, another old college friend. "We all desired," wrote Preston, "to acquire fluency [In French] and Legare wished to learn to speak elegantly." Hence, the company of travelers arranged for permission "to dine daily" with "a literary lady," a Madame de Epinarde, "where the conversation should be entirely in French."<sup>52</sup> Preston's progress in the language was less than striking, however, not because of his tutor's fault, but because of his own "vanity." Pride in his own vernacular cooled his interest in French.<sup>53</sup> "In truth," admitted Preston, "my instructress, little Natalie, learned English so rapidly that our talk was a good deal in that tongue." Preston also gave some time to the study of Italian, in which he made happier progress. "Natalie," he wrote, "said that my attempts to speak it were more successful than those of French."<sup>54</sup>

Preston did not fail to capitalize on the cultural wealth of

<sup>50</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 50.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 64.

the French capital. Availing himself of Parisian library facilities he set for himself a strict regimen of reading.

Almost the whole time that I was there, I spent every morning except Saturday in the Bibliothéque du Roy. As soon as it was perceived that I was an habitué my chair and place at the table seemed to be reserved for me and the officials of the room saluted me on a morning when I came in. I read assiduously four hours every day, from nine to one, and then went a sight-seeing.<sup>55</sup>

Preston's appetite for reading was not less keen, however, than for the masterpieces of art that festooned the famed Louvre. His daily walks on the Paris Boulevards led him invariably to the doors of the Louvre Gallery which "yet blazed with the glories of art brought to that place from all parts of Europe." With unalloyed rapture, the young tourist beheld the specimens of Italian Art, which proved "a perpetual glory" to his imagination. The "French style of art," however, Preston found "unpleasant." So, too, he found the "Dutch painters." While Preston's nascent taste for art was stimulated by the paintings of the Louvre, he found the statuary still more absorbing. "My natural taste for statuary," he believed, "was perhaps stronger than for painting." Amidst the sensuousness of the Louvre, he could not forget, however, his "emotion of delight" in viewing at Wrexham the statue by Roubillae.<sup>56</sup>

The visual feasts of the Louvre were not less pleasurable to Preston than were the symphonies of sight and sound of the Parisian theatres. "The theatres of Paris were then [1818] in the highest state of perfection," Preston declared. At the Theatre Francaise, he

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

empathized strongly with the performances of Francois Talma and Catherine-Joseph Duchesnoise, French tragic actors. He spiced his round of theatre entertainment, moreover, with polite comedy, in which Anne Monvel Mars, the French actress, was "inimitable." Besides, with his friend Legare, he enjoyed the "rich farce of Potier," and the "naivette and idiomatic finesse [*sic*] of the Vaudeville."<sup>57</sup>

Reluctantly, Preston left Paris, where the "pleasures of the senses and the intellect" were "almost unlimited."<sup>58</sup> A period of travel in Italy came next. Provided with a passable facility in the Italian language, Preston left Paris for Rome, in the company of Govan, Brown, the Louisiana Senator, and Brown's wife. By carriage the party made their way through the Swiss Alps to Rome.<sup>59</sup> In Rome, "the sepulchre of nations," Preston's emotions plunged to solemnity and awe. To his Protestant eye, Rome was

a degraded, creaking superstition depressing the human soul and body into vice and crime, with so deep a degradation that men are transformed to such an extent as not to perceive their foul disfigurement, but boast themselves more comely than before and are content to roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>William C. Preston, Eulogy on Hugh Swinton Legare, Delivered at the request of the City of Charleston, [S. C.], November 7, 1843 (Charleston, S. C., 1843), 10. Cited hereafter as Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare.

<sup>58</sup>Farborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 64.

<sup>59</sup>Preston recorded that on the trip to Rome, he determined to "keep a journal" of his travels in Italy, "to make some sketches of objects" which particularly appealed to him, and "to mark the emotions" with which the objects "affected him." This work he dropped, however, upon finding that his experiences "were precisely those that had already been recorded an hundred times with all the elegance of description and minuteness of detail possible."

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 78-79.

Preston was sure he saw "the slime of the serpent everywhere" in Roman society. But above the "foul influences" of the serpent were the ennobling objects of Roman art, in which Preston steeped his senses. He visited the Colosseum, St. Peter's Cathedral, the Apollo Belvedere, and viewed Raphael's Transfiguration.

In Rome the things which struck me most forcibly were these and in this order--first the monuments of Antiquity, 2nd, the Specimens of Art, ancient, medieval and modern,--3rd, the strange preponderance in the population of priests, prostitutes, and beggars. . . .<sup>61</sup>

Ever alert to opportunities for improving himself in speechcraft, Preston also gave some hours in Rome to the study of the performances of the famous Italian improvisadores, troubadours who recited verses composed impromptu. "Several of the performers," he recalled, "exhibited great skill and when they became warm a most liquid stream of seeming passion was uttered and in such equable cadence that the accompaniment on the piano was in perfect accord." But these exhibitions did not fill Preston "with the wonder expressed by others." "My own experience from a very early age, that of 14 or 15," he says, "had taught me that extemporary utterance was not so difficult as is generally imagined, and implies no very peculiar intellectual endowments."<sup>62</sup>

After eight weeks in the Italian capital, Preston and his party journeyed to Naples, leaving unseen only those attractions "not written in the Guide books. . . ."<sup>63</sup> They missed the "performance of

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 82-84.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 88.

any miracles" in Naples, but saw Mount Vesuvius and "the excavations of Portici."<sup>64</sup> In May, they made their way back to Rome, where they spent a week before "taking the road for the Alps and Gaul."

The contrast between Florence and other Italian cities overwhelmed Preston. Of all places he had ever seen, Florence was "the most beautiful and attractive." "Whatever nature could do in her most lavish moods," Preston concluded, "she has done for it, and then it is decorated with all that prodigality of art which wealth and taste for centuries could bestow upon it."<sup>65</sup> In his contemplations of Florence, the spirit of Dante, Michaelangelo, and Raphael hovered over him. In ecstatic vein, he wrote:

To breathe the air [of Florence] was a luxury, to open one's eyes was to see a glory, and if you closed them what memories flowed in upon the soul. Science and Literature and Philosophy--and courage and fortitude.<sup>66</sup>

Leaving Florence, Preston proceeded back to Paris by way of Bologna, Modena, and Venice. Inelegance he now saw all about him. In Parma, he looked upon Marie Louise, Napoleon's second wife, who, "pale, haggard and almost scrawny, affected very little state." Venice was a "damp, silent city, of "amphibian existence," belonging properly neither to land nor to water. Only once did Preston's spirit kindle--when he viewed the Rialto, "'where merchants most did congregate. . . ." "One touch of Shakespeare," he reflected, "has sanctified it as a

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 89-95.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 110.

stroke of lightening hallowed the object it struck."<sup>67</sup>

Preston put off his somber mood as he and his party descended "the northern declivity of the Alps." His mind "sprang to Paris" in his anticipation of the return to "a circle of intimate friends," which included his college classmates, Legare. Upon his arrival in the French capital, he found, as he had expected, a "most cordial reception."<sup>68</sup>

With Legare and Govan, Preston returned by way of London to Edinburgh, where the three travelers determined to "attend a course of lectures" at the University of Edinburgh. In November, 1818, Preston enrolled as an "occasional student," in the School of Law.<sup>69</sup> He registered for only two courses, "Natural Philosophy and Civil Law," passing up the private classes of "Dr. Murray, the distinguished lecturer on Chemistry," as well as the lectures on mathematics, both of which were popular among the seventeen American students in attendance at the University.<sup>70</sup>

Understandably, Preston did not commit himself more heavily to formal studies. On his previous visit to Edinburgh with Irving, he had

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 117-118.

<sup>68</sup>With the return to Paris, Preston's "Reminiscences" and. Begun a year before his death, the manuscript was never completed.

<sup>69</sup>The Matriculation Album of the University of Edinburgh indicates that Preston was enrolled as a "non-graduating" student during the academic year 1818-1819. At that time non-graduating students "did not undertake the class tests and examinations which were required by those who intended to graduate." G. Stables, Secretary of the University of Edinburgh, to the writer, Edinburgh, Scotland, October 2, 1956.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.; Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 139; E. S. Thomas, Reminiscences of the Last Sixty-Five Years, 2 vols. (Hartford, 1840), I, 147.



felt the magnetism of the city's polite society with its brilliant coterie of scientists, literati, and socialites. He believed that Edinburgh was "the most intellectual and agreeable city in Europe, to any foreigner who had claims to Denizenship in the Republic of Letters."<sup>71</sup> Beyond the walls of the university was a very special attraction to Preston--Abbotsford, the imposing mansion of Scott on the Tweed. To Abbotsford Preston hurried with his letter of introduction from Irving. The venerable Scottish novelist, busy on a new work, The Bride of Lammermoor, welcomed the good-natured Virginian, for whom he quickly "took a special fancy." During the winter, Preston was "such at Abottsford," indulging his admiration for Scott, and feasting his spirit on Scottish romance.<sup>72</sup> These associations with Scott, he later regarded "as constituting an era in his life."<sup>73</sup>

Sir Walter Scott now took the place of Irving as Preston's counselor. From Scott Preston sought advice on how to capitalize most fully upon his stay in Edinburgh. The author's opinion was that Preston "would scarcely ever meet with such society as was then in and around Edinburgh." He should, therefore, "by all means take advantage of it." He should also "be diligent in attending all the lectures at the University, for there was a remarkable set of professors." On the other hand, Preston should remember that "books he could carry with

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<sup>71</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 11.

<sup>72</sup>Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 139.

<sup>73</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 286.

him anywhere."<sup>74</sup>

At the university Preston spent two hours daily in the lecture room, with Professor Alexander Irving in civil law, and John Playfair in natural philosophy. "The Professor of Civil law," declared Preston, "was a man of small talent and moderate learning in his department, although not without general erudition. . . . He was, however, earnest and attentive." The selection of Heineccius as the text for the course was, in Preston's estimation, a wise one, as it "gave an interest to the study which it might not have derived from the professor."

The terse and elegant style of this writer [Heineccius], his lucid method and exact and full learning, were sufficient of themselves to lure a man of cultivated taste and literary propensities to the study of this science, even in the absence of any purpose of practical utility.<sup>75</sup>

John Playfair, Professor of natural philosophy, was perhaps the most profound scholar in the university. Respected as a mathematician and geologist, he had contributed substantially to the world of pure science during his long lifetime. He had become professor of natural philosophy in 1805, after a service of twenty years to the university, five of which were devoted to his most famous work, Illustrations of the Huttonian Theory of the Earth. This work "not only gave popularity to Hutton's theory, but helped to create the modern science of

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<sup>74</sup>Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 139.

<sup>75</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 12-13.

<sup>76</sup>Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee (eds.), The Dictionary of National Biography, 22 vols. (London, 1917-1922), XV, 1299-1300.

geology."<sup>76</sup> With assiduity Preston applied himself to natural philosophy, filling his notebook with the "elegant and luminous exposition" of Playfair's lectures on Hutton's geological doctrines.<sup>77</sup>

Preston's stay in Edinburgh was delightfully and profitably spent. During vacation periods he sought out the "places where literature was the topic of chief interest." Many long winter evenings were devoted to fascinating conversation with Scott at Abbotsford. There was also time to accompany Legare to Glasgow "to hear the celebrated Dr. Chalmers speak."<sup>78</sup> A Presbyterian evangelical preacher, Thomas Chalmers was, at the time of Preston's visit, minister of the Tron parish in Glasgow. One contemporary critic thought Chalmers' pulpit manner "rugged and uncouth," and his sermon organization unrefined. But his "eloquence was irresistible."<sup>79</sup> In Edinburgh, Preston enjoyed a most cordial relationship with Legare, his roommate.<sup>80</sup> Though he may not have had the satisfaction of knowing it, Preston and Legare had elevated "the general estimate of the American character" in the Scottish capital.<sup>81</sup>

Concluding his course of study at Edinburgh, Preston left behind him the storied old world, and returned to Abingdon, Virginia,

<sup>77</sup>Preston to Francis Smith Preston, Edinburgh, Scotland, January 4, 1819. William Campbell Preston Papers. Caroliniana Library.

<sup>78</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 13.

<sup>79</sup>Quoted in Stephen and Lee (eds.), Dictionary of National Biography, III, 1358-1359.

<sup>80</sup>Rhea, Hugh Swinton Legare, 52.

<sup>81</sup>George Ticknor, quoted, ibid.

in the summer of 1819.<sup>82</sup> The "plan of education," as mapped out by Francis Preston, had been fulfilled, and now he stood at the threshold of a professional career in law and politics. He was admitted to the Virginia bar in 1820. Thomas Jefferson, impressed with Preston's qualifications, tendered him the professorship of law at the University of Virginia.<sup>83</sup> Jefferson's offer was flattering, but Preston passed up the allurements of the lecture room because he preferred to try his abilities in the bustling life of the bar.

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<sup>82</sup>La Borda, History of the South Carolina College, 286.

<sup>83</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 10.

## CHAPTER V

### YOUTHFUL FORENSIC PLEADER

Though born and reared a Virginian, Preston chose to identify himself with the fortunes of South Carolina, where he launched in earnest his legal career in 1822. Columbia, the seat of South Carolina College, he could not forget. As a college student he had formed a number of treasured friendships. Many of his classmates, natives of South Carolina, had already begun their careers. There were still other motivating factors. These were "the days when South Carolina was still the land of beckoning opportunity and freedom for men to think what they would."<sup>1</sup> Almost innumerable were the sons and daughters of Virginia who made their way into neighboring South Carolina, which was indebted to Virginia even for the father of Calhoun himself. Also, Preston appears to have preferred the somewhat milder climate of South Carolina to that of Virginia.<sup>2</sup> Finally, Preston's bride, Maria Coalter, whom he had married upon his return from Europe, concurred with him in the selection of Columbia as their place of residence. Preston's wife, to whom he had become attached while a student at South Carolina College was, like himself, not native

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<sup>1</sup>David Duncan Wallace, The History of South Carolina, 3 vols. (New York, 1934), II, 475.

<sup>2</sup>Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 136.

to the state. Her early childhood was spent in Missouri, but she had resided for a number of years in Columbia, where her father served as a judge.<sup>3</sup>

To what extent Preston was occupied with legal studies between the time of his marriage in 1819, and his admission to the South Carolina bar in 1822, is not known. That he was admitted to practice in Virginia in 1820 is certain. Evidence indicates, however, that he pursued his legal studies informally, "acquiring a more extensive knowledge of the law." Presumably, he was also engaged to some extent in legal activities with his father.<sup>4</sup>

At any rate, Preston's knowledge of Blackstone was sufficient in 1822 to enable him to pass the oral examination, which was the immediate step leading to the granting of a license to practice. Between the years 1785 and 1812, the two major requirements for certification to practice law in South Carolina were (1) the completion of "at least three years of formal apprenticeship, either in a law school or in a competent barrister's office," and (2) the passing of an oral examination on the applicant's "knowledge and character," as administered by a judge. The three-year clause was removed from the statute books in 1812; nonetheless, "only a few men chose to begin their practice without considerable prior preparation."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men, II, 58.

<sup>4</sup>O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 532; Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit. (October, 1899), 467; Preston to Francis Smith Preston, Columbia, South Carolina, December 1, 1822. William Campbell Preston Papers.

<sup>5</sup>Jack Kenny Williams, "The Criminal Lawyer in Ante-Bellum South Carolina," South Carolina Historical Magazine, LVI (July, 1955), 142.



Immediately following Preston's admission to the bar, he formed "a short partnership" with D. J. McCord,<sup>6</sup> the law reporter of South Carolina and a co-editor of Nott and McCord's Law Reports. McCord, who had just dissolved his partnership with Henry Junius Nott, was one of Columbia's most prominent attorneys.<sup>7</sup> As McCord's clientele was considerable, Preston was immediately introduced "to the notice and knowledge of the people." Moreover, "when once heard," declared one contemporary, "he needed no helping-hand to carry him forward."<sup>8</sup>

Preston could hardly have chosen a more propitious time and place for the genesis of his evolution from pleader to politician. The legal profession in South Carolina was just entering a period of vigorous growth. By 1824, the state had worked out an improved court organization. In 1800, circuit courts were instituted in each of the separate judicial districts, which "brought courts of the fullest civil and criminal jurisdictions within easy reach of every citizen." Moreover, a Court of Appeals with its own three judges was created in 1824, "with complete powers in all appeals in law and equity and with the right to order extra courts." Such arrangement superseded the older practice of allowing appeals to be handled by the circuit judges "en blanc."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Preston to Francis Smith Preston, Columbia, South Carolina, December 1, 1822. William Campbell Preston Papers.

<sup>7</sup>O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 509.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 532-533.

<sup>9</sup>Wallace, The History of South Carolina, II, 459-460.

As a group, moreover, ante-bellum South Carolina barristers were trained men, "qualified by study and experience to practice their profession." The state was already bristling with fine legal minds when Preston entered upon the practice of law in Columbia. By 1854, as many as 1,447 graduates of South Carolina College had become attorneys, and the great majority of them had entered practice in the state.<sup>10</sup> The bench as well as the bar did not want for talent. One judge testified before the legislature in 1847 that the South Carolina bench was, in 1818, "the strongest he had ever known."<sup>11</sup>

Financial emolument was hardly sufficient to lure many young lawyers to the practice of law in South Carolina. Prize cases, particularly in Columbia and in Charleston, were available to the lawyer with a splendid record. Most lawyers, after some experience, received "a fair share of available business." The real problem was not, however, so much in procuring cases, as it was in "obtaining those able and willing to pay legal fees." By the standards of the day, the legal fees were modest, but most lawyers experienced much difficulty in collecting them.<sup>12</sup> Preston appears, however, to have escaped this unpleasant burden. He is purported in law to have made "fortune after fortune," which, incidentally, "he spent with equal celerity."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Williams, "The Criminal Lawyer in Ante-Bellum South Carolina," *loc. cit.*, 142.

<sup>11</sup>Wallace, *The History of South Carolina*, II, 456.

<sup>12</sup>Williams, "The Criminal Lawyer in Ante-Bellum South Carolina," *loc. cit.*, 148-149.

<sup>13</sup>Preston, *Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian*, 136.

But if the practice of law did not insure the highest remuneration, the profession flourished, nonetheless. Members of the legal profession enjoyed high prestige among the "conscious and militant aristocracy composed of the planting and professional classes. . . ."<sup>14</sup> Among the lower strata of society, members of the barrister breed were generally suspect, however, for the average lawyer was thought to be dishonest.<sup>15</sup> Still, the influential planter-professional group accorded high rank to the attorney.

More important, the legal profession was considered the road to political preferment in South Carolina.<sup>16</sup> Preston himself phrased succinctly the significance of a law practice to the political aspirant.

The profession of law in this country involves the cultivation of eloquence, and leads to political advancement and public honors. In this respect we nearly resemble the Roman Republic, and what is true of the whole country is more emphatically so of our own State. A preparation for the bar is supposed to be a preparation for public affairs; and it is the temper of the people to give their suffrages to those who come to it with a reputation of talents and learning.<sup>17</sup>

The legal profession did, indeed, involve "the cultivation of eloquence." Skill in persuasion was demanded of the South Carolina lawyer, particularly in his criminal pleading. As Williams stated:

<sup>14</sup>Rosser H. Taylor, Ante-Bellum South Carolina: A Social and Cultural History. The James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science, XXV (Chapel Hill, 1942), 41.

<sup>15</sup>Williams, "The Criminal Lawyer in Ante-Bellum South Carolina," loc. cit., 138.

<sup>16</sup>Charles Fraser, Reminiscences of Charleston (Charleston, 1854), 169.

<sup>17</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh Legare, 14.

The judicious selection of jurymen and witnesses, the ability to seek out flaws in indictments, and the knowledge of accepted methods by which cases might be postponed, were all weapons in the lawyer's arsenal; but once the case was off the court calendars and the trial underway, forensic excellence became more often than not the skill needed beyond all others.

The days of "narrow legal specialization" were yet far off, and the lawyer's specialized educational background was scarcely as important as his "demonstrated ability to sway a jury." Many men, in fact, left the profession because they found themselves wanting in persuasive skills. The most notable example, perhaps, was William John Grayson, who admitted that his failure in law was the result of his ineptness in oral discourse. Wrote Grayson: "I was destitute of . . . the face of bronze and tongue of iron so indispensable at the bar."<sup>18</sup>

Preston, in contrast, was remarkably well suited to the temper of the South Carolina bar, for he possessed the "face of bronze and the tongue of iron" requisite to success in judicial speaking. La Borde declared that Preston "has made some of the finest forensic displays which have ever been witnessed in our State. Whenever it was known that he was to speak in an important cause, there was the most eager desire to hear him. With his fine powers of elocution all were fascinated. . . ."<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Rion spoke of Preston's "polished eloquence that always won attention to his argument. . . ."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, as a man of practical nature, inclined toward the pragmatic rather

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<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Williams, "The Criminal Lawyer in Ante-Bellum South Carolina," loc. cit., 143.

<sup>19</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 292.

<sup>20</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 10.

than academic speculation, Preston was disposed to ask, whether in law, in politics, or in education, "Will it work?" "Does experience furnish precedent?"<sup>21</sup> Also, Preston was energetic and enterprising--qualities without which a barrister could hardly have sustained himself in the vigorous, competitive world of South Carolina legal practice. Preston placed strong emphasis upon mettle and industry, writing to his father soon after he began practice:

Tomorrow I argue a case before the court of appeals--You may smile at this. --but I shall be well prepared and what cannot labour do? Success is more frequently lost by want of courage than want of merit. --so I am determined to try and the Lord grant me a safe deliverance.<sup>22</sup>

One contemporary jurist wrote that Preston's arguments before the South Carolina Court of Appeals revealed him as "a great and original thinker, and a lawyer who came to the fight with the fullest and most painstaking preparation. On those occasions he wrestled with Pettigrew [sic] and other legal giants, and it is evident they found in him no lightweight, but a foeman worthy of their steel."<sup>23</sup> Finally, Preston possessed the argumentative skill requisite to effectiveness at the South Carolina bar. B. F. Perry, a prominent ante-bellum South Carolina lawyer, declared of him, "In his arguments on the circuit and in the Court of Appeals he proved himself an able logician as well as a brilliant

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<sup>21</sup>In this connection, see Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit. (December, 1899), 588.

<sup>22</sup>Preston to Francis Smith Preston, Columbia, South Carolina, December 1, 1822. William Campbell Preston Papers.

<sup>23</sup>Quoted in Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit. (December, 1899), 588.

rhetorician."<sup>24</sup> Likewise, while La Borde assigned predominant weight to Preston's "perceptive faculties," he did "not regard him as defective in logical and argumentative power" in juristic address.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, Preston possessed attributes and abilities which fitted him for the South Carolina bar. There were also certain fortunate circumstances attending his legal beginnings. Most important, perhaps, was his affiliation with McCord. The partnership with McCord proved a happy one, for the two barristers complemented each other in a most advantageous manner. O'Neill, in his sketch of McCord, declares: "He was a good lawyer, and argued his cases with great legal ingenuity; but he wanted that degree of force and point, which is necessary to make an impression on a jury, and sometimes became tedious in his legal arguments."<sup>26</sup> Preston was evidently a good counterbalance for McCord, since the jury trial was his forte.<sup>27</sup> His jury speeches, "for power and tact," wrote Graham, "were a constant source of wonder to his contemporaries. . . ."<sup>28</sup> Some critics--among them La Borde and Rion--attempted analyses of Preston's jury speaking, and concurred that his uncommon successes were attributable in part to his nice perception of the strong points of a case. Besides, his "admirable adroitness in the

<sup>24</sup>Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men, II, 58.

<sup>25</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 292.

<sup>26</sup>O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 510.

<sup>27</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 10.

<sup>28</sup>Graham, "The History of Southern Oratory During the Federal Period, 1788-1861," loc. cit., 50-51.



examination of witnesses," his "extraordinary skill in sifting and connecting testimony," and his "wonderful fertility of invention and illustration," were factors which helped to render Preston "almost irresistible before judge and jury."<sup>29</sup>

Preston's first year in Columbia was indeed roseate. With the help of his father, he was able to purchase a "house and lot of four acres in a very desirable part of town." This enabled him to be located among a generation which he knew. To his father he wrote, "The Legislature is full of my old friends who meet me with the most cordial greetings."<sup>30</sup> These same friends were instrumental in Preston's election in the fall as a trustee of South Carolina College, his alma mater.<sup>31</sup> By year's end, he could report:

I begin to feel as if I had begun life in earnest and am every moment more and more at home in So. Carolina. I look for no eminent success in any way under five years but if I merit it I feel assured I shall attain it some day.<sup>32</sup>

As events proved, Preston's prediction was far too modest. Within a year following his admission to the South Carolina bar, he was a proven pleader, capable of sustaining himself among the more experienced lawyers. He was employed during this period in a contested election case before the South Carolina Senate, "between General Geddes

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<sup>29</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 10; La Borte, History of the South Carolina College, 292.

<sup>30</sup>Preston to Francis Smith Preston, Columbia, South Carolina, December 1, 1822. William Campbell Preston Papers.

<sup>31</sup>O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 532.

<sup>32</sup>Preston to Francis Smith Preston, Columbia, South Carolina, December 1, 1822. William Campbell Preston Papers.

and William Crafts, which was the occasion of great excitement in the Legislature and in the State." La Borde stated that in this trial Preston

bore himself with spirit and ability, and among other compliments, it may be mentioned that he so excited the admiration of Colonel James Hamilton, that he sought an introduction to him at the close of his speech, which soon ripened into an intimacy that, amid the many changes of fortune, never suffered the slightest diminution.<sup>33</sup>

Preston's reputation as a legal advocate was largely the product of his circuit speeches, particularly in criminal cases, which O'Neill believed were "unsurpassed."<sup>34</sup> In the sessions courts of the districts of Camden and Orangeburg, held twice each year, Preston sought during the early years of his legal career to carve a niche for himself. While most of the speeches of these courts were either not reported at all, or only in rudimentary form,<sup>35</sup> accounts of certain cases, particularly the more dramatic ones, found their way into public records of various types. From these accounts, something may be learned not only of the nature of the cases with which the advocate was identified, but also of his skill in the management of them.

Among the criminal cases which Preston argued, one in

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<sup>33</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 287.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 533.

<sup>35</sup>Some contemporary South Carolina advocates, notably Hugh S. Legare, lamented the unhappy fate of forensic speeches. In 1830, Legare reminded his colleagues that while congressional speeches were "spread before the public in all their amplitude, the treasures of our forensic eloquence are rapidly passing into obscurity. . . . The art of reporting, with all its present 'appliances and means' enables us to preserve but a few of the [forensic] fragments which confer lustre on our own period." Hugh S. Legare, "Ancient and Modern Oratory," The Southern Review, VII (May, 1830), 319.

particular exemplifies his dexterity as a pleader. In his account of the case, O'Neill declared of Preston:

His defence of Fleming, for the murder of Barkley, Sheriff, of Fairfield, both in tact, ability, and eloquence deserves all praise. He selected, contrary to all that was or is usual, the most intelligent men on the panel for his jury. It was a plain case of murder; yet, notwithstanding, a capital argument by Solicitor Player, and the weight of my authority as the presiding Judge, he obtained a verdict of manslaughter.<sup>36</sup>

Preston's skill in the management of speech material and his powers of memory are illustrated by this particular case. One observer recalled:

The evidence was strong against his client, and the only plea upon which any hope of acquittal could be founded was that of self-defence. His quick and retentive memory recalled a very similar case in which Cicero had succeeded upon the same plea. In his speech he not only availed himself of the ingenious defence of the Roman orator, but captivated the jury and the audience by a paraphrase of his glowing and most impassioned eloquence.<sup>37</sup>

One of the most sensational speeches by Preston in a trial court was an arson case, tried in Columbia in 1833, immediately prior to his election to the United States Senate. Preston and James Gregg represented the defendant, Jacob Meetze, a Columbia merchant, charged with setting fire to his store building in order to collect on a ten-thousand-dollar insurance contract. With the aid of his clerk, one Singletary, Meetze filed an insurance claim with the Charleston insurers immediately following the fire, and the claim was settled by

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<sup>36</sup>O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 533.

<sup>37</sup>Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 144.

full payment. As it transpired, Meetze then went to Charleston, leaving Singletary in Columbia to collect his accounts. Some months later, Singletary sold to Henry Drafts of Lexington, at a sizeable discount, a note on Meetze for two hundred dollars, payable thirty days after date at the Commercial Bank of Columbia. Bank officials, however, pronounced the Singletary note a forgery. After Singletary had been lodged in jail, he swore that Meetze had put the store to fire and had given the note to him "to keep the secret." Meetze was then apprehended and jailed in Columbia. Singletary was later tried for forgery at Lexington and acquitted.<sup>38</sup>

The action against Meetze, brought in Columbia in October, 1833, consumed considerable time and evoked high public interest. Scott declared: "The ability of the counsel [Preston and Gregg], the consequences of a conviction to their clients, which elicited unusual efforts, and Meetze's numerous and respectable family connections, all conspired to heighten the public agitation."<sup>39</sup> In the trial Preston and his associate pitted their powers against three other able South Carolina pleaders, Blanding and W. F. De Saussure of Columbia, and A. P. Butler of Edgefield, who were counsel for Singletary and the Charleston insurance firm. The case itself was, moreover, a knotty one. During the doubtful stages of the struggle, Preston wrote in dejected vein to his friend, Waddy Thompson, "We are in the midst of Meetze's case, gloomy & groping with an indistinct vision of the

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<sup>38</sup>Scott, Random Recollections, 134-135.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 135-136. See, also, Columbia Telescope, October 11, 1833.

gallows before us."<sup>40</sup>

As the trial progressed, one issue of fact emerged sharply from the various allegations: the question of the origin of the fire. In order to sustain their side of the case, it was imperative that Preston and his colleague impeach the testimony of Singletary, who alleged

that shortly before the fire Meetze had bought a keg of tar and placed it under the counter; that when the alarm of fire was made the floor was found covered with the tar which had been poured out and ignited . . . consuming the building with its contents.<sup>41</sup>

The turning point of the case was the defense's invalidation of Singletary's story of the origin of the fire. Preston and Gregg brought into the courtroom a keg of tar, "and all efforts to set it on fire proved that tar cannot be made to burn until heated to the boiling point--a fact that was not generally known, and certainly not to Singletary. . . ." The jury returned a verdict of "not guilty" in a "very few minutes."<sup>42</sup>

While the jury trial offered the most favorable field for the exercise of Preston's abilities as a pleader, he did not, on the other hand, eschew the appellate case. He was in fact engaged during his career in a considerable number of cases at law which were reviewed by the Columbia Court of Appeals.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, as earlier

<sup>40</sup>Preston to Waddy Thompson, Jr., Columbia, South Carolina, October 15, 1833. Waddy Thompson Papers, Caroliniana Library.

<sup>41</sup>Scott, Random Recollections, 136.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Examination of the reports of cases at law argued and determined in the Court of Appeals of South Carolina indicate that



stated, in certain of these causes Preston measured words with some of South Carolina's finest legal minds--minds that found in him a worthy foe.<sup>44</sup> In these cases he was evidently sustained by careful research, acute analysis, and lucid argumentation. Thus, O'Neill wrote:

For over forty years I have been in the Courts of Appeal as a lawyer or a Judge. I have heard all the great advocates of South Carolina, and I am sure I have heard as fine legal arguments from Colonel Preston as from any other. His argument in Myers v. Myers, 2nd McCord, C. R. 219 [214], will serve as a specimen, which can be consulted.<sup>45</sup>

The case of Myers v. Myers, cited by O'Neill, a bill in equity, was argued in the Columbia Court of Appeals during the January and May terms, 1827, before Chancellor Junius Nott.<sup>46</sup> The questions of the

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Preston was identified with at least 29 appeal cases. See McClure v. Mounce, 2 McCord 423 (1823); Nicholson and Co. v. Withers, 2 McCord 428 (1823); Halls, Kirkpatrick and Co. v. Howell, 1 Harper 426 (1824); The Bank of the State v. Edward Croft, Indorser, 3 McCord 522 (1826); Edgar, Adm. of William M'Kensie, adg. Brown, 4 McCord 91 (1827); Taylor v. Hampton, 4 McCord 96 (1827); Survivors of Halls, Kirkpatrick and Co. v. Coe, Green, and Randolph, 4 McCord 136 (1827); Boylston, et al., v. Cordes, et al., 4 McCord 144 (1827); Jennings v. Fundeburg, 4 McCord 161 (1827); Heirs at Law of Mason Lee v. Ex. of Mason Lee, 4 McCord 183 (1827); Hall v. Moorman, 4 McCord 283 (1827); Harmon v. Arthur, 1 Bailey 83 (1828); Boatwright, et al., v. Faust, et al., 4 McCord 439 (1828); Marshall v. Nagel and Thompson, 1 Bailey 266 (1829); Myers v. Myers, 1 Bailey 306 (1829); Marshall v. Nagel and Thompson, 1 Bailey 308 (1829); Brock v. Thompson, 1 Bailey 322 (1829); Smith v. Rice, 1 Bailey 648 (1830); Ex parte John Black, 2 Bailey 8 (1830); Baldrick and Weston v. White, 2 Bailey 442 (1831); Callender and Co. v. Duncan, 2 Bailey 454 (1831); Treasurers of the State v. Taylor, 2 Bailey 524 (1831); Cain v. Maples, 1 Hill 304 (1833); Lee v. Ware, 1 Hill 313 (1833); Singleton v. Lewis, 2 Hill 680 (1835); Durant v. Ashmore, 2 Richardson 184 (1845); The State v. Dent, 1 Richardson 469 (1845); Robertson v. Pope, 1 Richardson 501 (1845); Taylor v. Taylor, 1 Richardson 531 (1845).

<sup>44</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., (December, 1899), 588.

<sup>45</sup>O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 533.

<sup>46</sup>Myers et al. v. Myers et al., 2 McCord, Eq. (S. C.) 214 (1827).



case arose from the construction of Jacob Myers' will, which contained the following provision:

I give and bequeath unto my dear and beloved grandchildren, being the lawful issue of my dear son David Myers, to them and their heirs forever, all my landed estate, which consists together of three thousand seven hundred and fifty acres. .

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Upon the death of Jacob Myers, his only son, David Myers, qualified as executor. At the time of the execution of the will David had two children, Dr. John Myers and Mrs. Clendenin. His wife, "being then pregnant," was delivered of another son, William Myers, previous to the testator's death. Following the testator's death, David Myers "had six other children born." The will was filed in chancery by Dr. John Myers against the executor "for an account and for a division of the estate according to the will of his grandfather."<sup>48</sup>

The leading issue of the case was whether the children of David Myers, born subsequent to the death of Jacob Myers, were "entitled under the will with those born before his death." The chancellor who heard the case in equity court decreed that "all of the children of David Myers born before the oldest child, John Myers, came of age, should be admitted, and ordered the share of John and William Myers to be paid over to them, they having arrived at majority." From this decree all the children born before the death of the testator appealed.

In the appellate action, Preston, Harper, McCord, and Chappell represented the appellants, while O'Neill, Thompson, and Gregg were counsel for the appellees. The question submitted to the appeal court

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<sup>47</sup>Quoted, ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

was "whether the children in esse [in being] at the time of the death of the testator are exclusively entitled to the property, or whether the after-born children are entitled to participate with them."

Preston spoke first. Contending for the complainant, John Myers, he sought to show, through the examination of numerous cases on the subject and a minute scrutiny of the terms of the will itself, that the "after-born" children of David Myers were not entitled under the will to the assets of the Jacob Myers estate. Preston structured his argument as follows, marshalling authorities to buttress each sub-contention:

A. Three rules of law are applicable to this case, in which the central question is "as to vesting."

1. The general rule applicable to cases in which the period of vesting is indefinite is that "the earliest period of vesting" is adopted, for

a. The policy of the country "favors it," for

(1) It is "injurious to property to hang it up"; instead, property should "circulate" and be rendered "serviceable to the happiness of the people in all periods."

2. A second rule is: "When given to take effect at an indefinite period, . . . [The property] vests at the testator's death. . . ."

3. A third rule is: "An intention to extend . . . [The time of vesting] beyond the period of the testator's death, unless clearly expressed, will be inoperative."

- B. The property of Jacob Myers is given to take effect at an indefinite period, for
1. Careful examination of the terms of the will show that no definite period of vesting is expressed.
- C. "Certainly . . . the expression of intention [in this will] to extend the period [of vesting] beyond the death of the testator is not clear . . .," for
1. The parties in the cause are in disagreement as to the expression, for
    - (a) The counsel for the defense contend "the period of David Myers' life is intended," and
    - (b) The chancellor, notwithstanding the counsel's argument, "seems disposed to fix upon the period of twenty-one [years of age]."
  2. The will contains no expression which may be construed as extending the period of vesting beyond Jacob Myers' death.
- D. The arguments advanced to fix the period of vesting at majority age are unsound, for
1. The order in the will to the executor "to educate the children," cannot be urged as a reason for fixing the period of vesting at the time of the eldest child's arriving at majority age, for
    - (a) The appointment of David Myers as executor was made only for the purpose of "directing as to the education" of the children.

2. The fact that the "children, being minors, could not sue for their shares until they were twenty-one," does not fix the period of vesting at majority age, for
  - (a) Although as minors they could not sue, "that did not prevent their rights' vesting, as in every case of minors."

Since the will of Jacob Myers does not establish a definite period for the vesting of the property given under its terms; Therefore, the rules of law applicable in this case fix the period of vesting at Jacob Myers' death; and,

Since, at the time of Jacob Myers' death, his only son, David Myers had only three children; Therefore, the after-born children of David Myers are excluded and do not "take."

After strenuous and elaborate argument and counter-argument had been presented on behalf of the contending parties, Chancellor Nott modified the decree of the lower court in favor of the appellants. In the rendering of his opinion, Nott averred that "according to the legal construction of the will, the children in esse at the time of the testator's death are exclusively entitled to the property in question. And I think that all the authorities concur in that construction."<sup>49</sup>

The Myers case was a significant one in equity.<sup>50</sup> As O'Neill

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid. One newspaper editor observed in a satirical account of the Myers case, titled, "The Bar Militant," that six colonels were involved in the cause which was "combatted valiently [sic] for four days." Columbia Telescope, June 9, 1827.

<sup>50</sup>See Edwin S. Oakes, et al., (eds.), American Law Reports, First Series, 175 Vols. (Rochester, N. Y., 1919-1948), VI, 1346n, 1357n; CLXI, 636n. The case has been frequently cited to support the view that

contended, it demonstrated Preston's abilities in structuring a cogent legal argument. Not all of the cases Preston argued before the appeal courts were so significant, nor was he always successful in winning the decision. Yet, he appears to have been most meticulous in the marshalling of evidence, and was both subtle and forcible in the presentation of his case. Of the case of the State v. M'Lemore, a murder indictment, tried at Columbia in June, 1835, O'Neill declared, "His [Preston's] argument for M'Lemore . . . is not reported, except by the citation of his authorities. They will show his research; but his speech was unrivalled in argument and eloquence."<sup>51</sup> The chancellor who heard the case rendered his decision against Preston, but, significantly, noted that it was "ably and elaborately argued" by the counsel for the prisoner and Solicitor Elmore for the State.<sup>52</sup>

For the light it sheds upon Preston's methods as a legal advocate, one other case with which he was associated deserves consideration--that of Judge William D. James. This case, argued before the upper house of the South Carolina legislature in 1828, was not without historical significance, inasmuch as it climaxed a long series of attacks on the life tenure of South Carolina judges. As early as 1812, considerable discontent with "tenure during good behavior" had already developed. Impeachment attempts against Judge J. F. Grimke

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after-born children are excluded if the terms of the will do not show an intention to include them.

<sup>51</sup>O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 533. The report of this case shows that Preston, as counsel for the prisoner, M'Lemore, "cited and commented on" sixteen authorities.

<sup>52</sup>The State v. M'Lemore, 2 Hill (S. C.) 680 (1835).

in 1811 had failed. In 1810, the Charleston Master in Equity, William H. Gibbes, was impeached by the House "for unlawful selling of property for the benefit of one creditor. . . ." In the same year, moreover, the House voted by a slight margin not to impeach Chancellor Hugh Rutledge "for confirming the sale." Furthermore, impeachment charges were brought in the House in 1812 against Judge Drayton, who "petitioned both houses for further time to make up his deficiency."<sup>53</sup>

The attack on life tenure of judges entered a new phase in the fall of 1827. The leading charges had been "corruption" and "autocratic methods." By 1827, however, instances of intemperance on the bench had created "throughout the state," a considerable measure of dissatisfaction.<sup>54</sup> The attack, moreover, was strengthened by the "nation-wide temperance movement then beginning to exercise extraordinary force . . . to improve conditions."<sup>55</sup>

Public discontent registered in the legislative halls of South Carolina in 1827. On November 21, during the first term of the legislature, John B. O'Neill introduced resolutions "to amend the constitution to limit the term of judges to ten years and to permit their removal for any cause by a two-thirds vote of both houses of the legislature."<sup>56</sup> O'Neill's resolution passed the House, but failed

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<sup>53</sup>Wallace, The History of South Carolina, II, 456.

<sup>54</sup>Daniel Wallace, The Political Life and Services of the Hon. R. Barnwell Rhett (Cahaba, Ala., 1859), 13.

<sup>55</sup>Wallace, The History of South Carolina, II, 457.

<sup>56</sup>Henry Hardy Perritt, "Robert Barnwell Rhett: South Carolina Secession Spokesman," Ph. D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1954, 38.



in the Senate. Robert Barnwell Rhett, who held that life tenure during good conduct was desirable for the "stability and independence of the Bench," opposed the O'Neill resolution, and on the same day moved the impeachment of Judge William James. Rhett's resolution, which charged James with "the high crime and misdemeanor of habitual intemperance in the discharge of his duties," was referred to a special committee with Rhett as chairman.<sup>57</sup> The resolution prevailed, and Rhett was appointed to conduct the impeachment proceedings before the Senate. Preston was appointed counsel for Judge James.<sup>58</sup>

Preston did not hesitate to assume the responsibility of defending James, whose "gross habitual drunkenness" had been endured so long only because of the regard for him as "a gallant Revolutionary soldier."<sup>59</sup> To some extent, doubtless, Preston's strenuous efforts to rescue the aging judge were the product of his quick sympathies for the American revolutionaries. In his youth he had listened to stories of the heroic deeds of Revolutionary heroes, one of whom was his grandfather, General William Campbell. Besides, in his veins flowed the kindred blood of Patrick Henry, the "forest-born Demosthenes," whose shouts of defiance at the British crown rang in his imagination and stirred his blood.

Realizing, doubtless, that his cause was little short of hopeless, but nevertheless strongly motivated by sympathy for James,

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Wallace, The Political Life and Services of the Hon. R. Barnwell Rhett, 13.

<sup>59</sup>Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 456.

Freston spared no effort to stay the impeachment. His speech preparation on this occasion indicates not only an intense desire to save James, but also sheds, incidentally, considerable light on his emotional nature. One contemporary wrote, "In preparing this speech, which was done with elaborate care, the pathetic portion rose so palpably before him that he rested his head upon the desk and wept like a child."<sup>60</sup>

When Freston rose to present his defense of James, "every seat was occupied, and the aisles and galleries jammed." As he opened his address, "there was a hush that made breathing audible." Of his speech, one writer wrote:

His manner was grave and dignified as became the occasion, and the opening sentences caught and fixed the attention of the assembly. The argumentative portion was clear, spirited and able, and when he felt that his audience was in full sympathy with him he drew a picture of this pure and able judge, bowed and humiliated by a single infirmity, so pathetic that the whole assembly was moved to tears, and senators sobbed aloud.<sup>61</sup>

Though Freston exerted his best efforts, the Senate voted to impeach James, who was, accordingly removed from office. Robert Barnwell Rhett, Freston's opponent, has been credited with carrying the impeachment of James, "though opposed by the splendid oratory of William C. Preston, who, on that occasion, displayed a forensic ability and eloquence perhaps unsurpassed by himself and never

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<sup>60</sup>Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 143.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

equalled in the State. . . ."<sup>62</sup> O'Neill, who heard the impeachment proceedings, gave a terse appraisal of Preston's plea for acquittal, saying, "It was a great effort to save the poor old man, but truth and justice were mightier than eloquence or pity."<sup>63</sup> Herculean indeed was Preston's rhetorical undertaking. James was patently an habitual tippler. Besides, the tide of public opinion, lashed by the temperance movement, ran strong against the aging judge. The failure of the Grimke impeachment efforts, moreover, "had convinced many of the inefficiency of the provisions for impeachment as the Constitution then stood." Finally, in Rhett, Preston faced an able adversary, whose speech against James is purported to have been a masterful effort.

As it transpired, the glaring scandal of Judge James' habitual drunkenness was only one episode in a long series of events leading in 1828 to a constitutional amendment which provided, in part, for the removal of judges for "mental or physical infirmity by a two-thirds vote of each house after a hearing."<sup>64</sup>

Preston's legal career covered a span of almost a quarter of a century, extending to his appointment in 1846 as President of South Carolina College. He was most actively engaged as a legal advocate during the six years immediately prior to his election to the lower

<sup>62</sup>Daniel Wallace, quoted in Ferritt, "Robert Barnwell Rhett: South Carolina Secession Spokesman," loc. cit., 39.

<sup>63</sup>O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 533.

<sup>64</sup>Wallace, The History of South Carolina, II, 457.

house of the South Carolina legislature in 1828. Yet, as an examination of the various state law reports show, he continued intermittently to argue cases, though heavily engaged in political activity, taking up his practice in earnest again in 1842 following his resignation from the United States Senate. During his long legal career, Preston argued both in the trial and appellate courts in civil and criminal cases. He held his own in the bustling, competitive legal arena where he measured wits with the finest legal minds in the State. Significantly, one of these, James L. Petigru, referred to Preston as "eminent among the lawyers of South Carolina."<sup>65</sup> The testimony of other South Carolina jurists corroborates Petigru's opinion. Chancellor B. F. Dunkin, who heard certain of Preston's appellate arguments, declared him "an able lawyer."<sup>66</sup> Perry maintained of Preston, "No lawyer argued his cases with greater ability, or was more successful in his practice."<sup>67</sup>

The concurrent testimony of the bench and bar of Preston's time indicates that he had few superiors as a legal advocate. That he was uncommonly successful in the management of criminal suits in the trial courts seems certain. Miller, a South Carolina attorney, ventured the opinion that "the greatest majority of the people of this state would, if asked to single out some of our great criminal lawyers in the past, put Mr. Preston among the first."<sup>68</sup> Preston was, moreover, evidently

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<sup>65</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit. (December, 1899), 588.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men, II, 58.

<sup>68</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit. (December, 1899), 586.

an able civil lawyer, though civil cases did not offer him the finest field for the "display of his peculiar gifts."<sup>69</sup>

Contemporary legal minds did not concur, however, on the question of whether Preston was a "great lawyer." Rion, who thought Preston had "no superiors" as a lawyer, urged that while Preston was not a "case lawyer . . . one who is perfectly familiar with the decisions of our courts and all the obiter dicta of our judges"--he was, nonetheless, a "great lawyer," since he studied law as "a science based upon great principles."<sup>70</sup> La Borde, on the other hand, stated categorically of Preston, "I know that he does not take rank among the great lawyers of Carolina." Miller concurred with La Borde.

If Preston did not take rank as a "great lawyer," the explanation lies doubtless in three factors, two of which were personal. One hindrance to Preston's achievements at the bar was a "general impression" that he was "a lazy, pleasure-loving man, who did very little hard work of any kind, and trusted to his genius. . . ."<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup>Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 143.

<sup>70</sup>Rion, William C. Preston, 9-10. Rion's evaluation would seem to indicate that Preston's philosophy of law was significantly influenced by the German jurist, Johann Heineccius, with whose works he became acquainted while a student at Edinburgh. According to one authority, Heineccius "endeavored to treat law as a rational science, and not merely as an empirical art whose rules had no deeper source than expediency. Thus he continually refers to first principles, and he develops his legal doctrines as a system of philosophy." Encyclopedia Britannica, Eleventh edition, 29 vols. (Cambridge, 1910-1911), XIII, 215.

<sup>71</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit. (December, 1899), 586. Preston does not seem to have been hampered, as were some of his colleagues, by the suspicion of dishonesty. His integrity was, in fact, believed by some to have been unimpeachable. Scott speaks, for



The charge seems rather ironical in the light of significant contrary evidence which indicates that Preston, both in precept and practice, placed high emphasis upon industry and perseverance. Nevertheless, his reputation evidently suffered from the suspicion of many that he was indolent. Another personal factor which handicapped Preston was the belief that he lacked profundity of learning in the law, which he endeavored to offset by captivating eloquence.<sup>72</sup> Brooks, who felt that Preston and Legare were "two of the grandest lawyers" produced by South Carolina, declared that both suffered from the common but spurious charge, "he is a good jury lawyer, but not a good judge of the law."<sup>73</sup> La Borde believed that Preston could not be ranked among the "great lawyers of Carolina," for the reason that, as a lawyer, he did not possess "the profoundest learning."<sup>74</sup> Closely allied to this factor is yet another one which also provided in some measure a liability to Preston in his practice of law. After his entry into the state legislature in 1828, his energies were devoted chiefly to politics.<sup>75</sup> Particularly during the period from 1833 to 1842, he was absent from Columbia several months out of each year. Thus, he

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example, of a Columbia retailer, who was "so great an admirer of Colonel Preston that he made him his heir, and when [serving] on the jury refused to decide against his clients, arguing that no one had ever caught Preston in a lie or known him to commit a mean act." Scott, Random Recollections, 41.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>J. R. Brooks, South Carolina Bench and Bar, 2 vols. (Columbia, S. C., 1908), I, 14.

<sup>74</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 291.

<sup>75</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit. (December, 1899), 586.



invariably missed the December-January term of the Columbia Court of Appeals. The consequence was, of course, a diminution of his practice as well as a certain deterioration of his legal knowledge and skills. It was La Borda's contention that this factor, more than any other, prevented Preston from taking rank among "the great lawyers of Carolina."<sup>76</sup>

In final analysis, Preston achieved an enviable reputation as a legal advocate because, in large measure, of his rhetorical abilities--abilities without which the ante-bellum barrister could not have hoped to survive. His search of the law was sufficient and his powers of analysis and synthesis were acute. But more important--at least in jury trials--was his persuasive skill, which, in B. F. Perry's judgment, was the "positive secret" of any barrister's success.<sup>77</sup> He had, in short, what John W. Grayson confessed to have lacked--"the tongue of iron."

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<sup>76</sup>La Borda, History of the South Carolina College, 291.

<sup>77</sup>Williams, "The Criminal Lawyer in Ante-Bellum South Carolina," loc. cit., 143.

## CHAPTER VI

### NULLIFICATION SPOKESMAN

Preston's personal popularity, his demonstrated ability at the bar, and his ambitions, combined to catapult him--perhaps earlier than he had expected--into the political arena. He was elected to the lower house of the South Carolina legislature in 1828; re-elected in 1830, and again in 1832, each time by a comfortable majority. During his four years in the legislature, he played a prominent role in the bitterly-fought nullification controversy, which was just beginning when he made his advent on the political scene. In brief, Preston became one of the most ardent and influential advocates of the doctrine of nullification. At his request, Calhoun drafted the famous Exposition, a document in which he delineated South Carolina's grievances and developed the states rights doctrine as the only hope of preserving the Union. Moreover, as chairman of the powerful Federal Relations Committee of the House--a position he held during the entire four years--Preston was able to give strength to the State Rights party. From his committee issued resolutions embodying the key premises of Calhoun's Exposition. In his position as committee chairman, he became a propulsive force for a people's convention, and a key participant in the dramatic struggle between the Federal and the State governments precipitated by Jackson's Proclamation of 1832. Preston's value to his party was considerably enhanced, moreover, by his oratorical abilities,

which were brought to bear with affectiveness on the crucial issues of the colorful nullification controversy.

When Preston first took his seat in the legislature, the stage was set for the impending nullification struggle. An acute political crisis existed, the causes of which were at once multipla and complex. The immediate cause of the crisis was the passage by Congress of the "tariff of abominations" on May 24, 1828. This bill, drawn up by the House Committee on Manufactures, provided for a large increase of duties on practically all raw materials. Particularly obnoxious to the South was the increased duty on raw wool, which was to be advanced to thirty-five per cent after June 1, 1828; to forty per cent a year later.<sup>1</sup> "It had been customary to fix low duties on the coarse woollan goods made from cheap wool, partly because of the low duty on the wool itself, and partly because coarse woollens were used largely for slaves on Southern plantations."<sup>2</sup> Now the duties on woollens were advanced, as were the duties on iron, hemp, and flax. The result, of course, was a burden on the economy of South Carolina. The increased duties on manufactured articles increased the price to the planter. With an agricultural economy, sustained by the "peculiar institution," South Carolina was a consumer, not a producer, of manufactures. It was, therefore, natural that she should object to commercial restrictions designed to protect Northern manufacturers; "it was natural for her to contend that she should be allowed to buy and sell where

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Payson Powell, Nullification and Secession in the United States (New York, 1897), 263.

<sup>2</sup>F. W. Taussig, The Tariff History of the United States (New York, 1931), 92-93.

she pleased."<sup>3</sup> While the "tariff of abominations" was under consideration, Calhoun wrote to his brother-in-law:

Never was there such universal, and severe pressure on the whole South, excepting the portion which plants sugar. Our staples hardly return the expense of cultivation, and land and negroes have fallen to the lowest price, and can scarcely be sold at the present depressed rates.<sup>4</sup>

While the operation of the tariff laws was the immediate cause of South Carolina's economic distress, there were yet more fundamental causes. Declares Wiltse:

The root of the trouble lay in the economic system inherited from colonial days and perpetuated by a profoundly conservative system of government. The impact of the industrial revolution served only to fix it the more firmly, by enormously enlarging the demand for cotton and increasing in proportion the burden of slavery.<sup>5</sup>

A contributing factor was the opening up of new lands to the West, which resulted in overproduction of cotton and a consequent glutting of the cotton market during the decade, 1820-1830. During these years, moreover, South Carolina was being drained of both population and capital, as many of her citizens sought superior opportunities elsewhere. The ratio of the white to the black population changed radically. "The State's white majority of 31,283 in 1790 had been supplanted in 1820 by a black majority of 27,861."<sup>6</sup> The white increase during the decade 1820-1830 was only 8 per cent, as against

<sup>3</sup>David F. Houston, A Critical Study of Nullification in South Carolina (New York, 1908), 45.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun, 3 vols. (Indianapolis, 1944), I, 375.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 418.

a Negro increase of 22 per cent.<sup>7</sup> In a speech addressed to a meeting of citizens in Walterborough, October 21, 1828, James Hamilton described in graphic terms the gloomy domestic situation, which, he said "had dawned upon them suddenly." The "melancholy signs" of decay were everywhere to be seen. Asked Hamilton:

Where were the beautiful homesteads and venerable chateaux which once thronged the land? On the very hearthstone where hospitality once kindled the most genial fires that ever blazed on her altars, the fox may lie down in security and peace, and from the mouldering casement of the window from which the notes of virtuous revelry were once heard, the owl sends forth to the listening solitude of the surrounding waste her melancholy descent to mark the spot where desolation has come. . . . Where is now the busy hum of . . . [Charleston's] industry? Its capital? Its merchants? . . . All gone in the overwhelming ruin of its foreign trade.<sup>8</sup>

Such were the distressing evidences of South Carolina's failing economy. That the cause lay in the oppressive action of the protective principle, few South Carolinians doubted. Clearly the demands of the protectionists had grown "immoderate," and the trend in government was toward consolidation. "When it is decided," declared Hamilton in the Walterborough speech, "that the agriculture and trade of South Carolina shall be taxed two millions and a half to foster the manufactures of New England, this is consolidation in its most potent form. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

The Tariff Act of 1828 created "violent resentment" in the

<sup>7</sup>Houston, A Critical Study of Nullification in South Carolina, 47.

<sup>8</sup>Miles' Weekly Register, XXXV (November 22, 1828), 205.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 203.

state.<sup>10</sup> "As yet there were no clearly defined party lines throughout the state, as there came to be later when the State Rights party and the Union party were definitely organized." But the masses were "beginning to be aroused to the point where they were ready to contemplate other methods than resolutions against the tariff."<sup>11</sup> A

Columbia correspondent--presumably the controversial Dr. Thomas Cooper--wrote the Charleston Mercury on June 30:

On the subject of the tariff, the people of the interior are exasperated beyond measure. Not the stump orator and courtyard politicians of the day, but the substantial citizens of the country, without division, or with the division only of one in a thousand.

He went on to predict that if the Southern delegations in Congress "were to secede en masse . . . and organize a GOVERNMENT FOR THEM-

SELVES," the majority of the people would receive the news "with

bonfires and rejoicings."<sup>12</sup> During the summer and fall of 1828,

fiery toasts rang out at public meetings throughout the state. Typical were those pronounced at a Fourth of July meeting in Georgetown District:

The American System--originating in avarice, nourished by ambition and consummated by a violation of the constitution. . . . Southern Rights and Northern avarice--When the constitution is degraded to destroy one and support the other, resistance is a virtue.<sup>13</sup>

Hostility to the tariff was registered in many state newspapers, some

<sup>10</sup>Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 426.

<sup>11</sup>Chauncey S. Boucher, The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina (Chicago, 1916), 25.

<sup>12</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, XXXV (September 20, 1828), 61.

<sup>13</sup>Quoted, ibid.



of which had followed generally a course of moderation. The editor of the Charleston Mercury, for example, cried:

We do not wish disunion NOW, if we can have protection now and a security for it hereafter. We wish TO FORCE the decision on those who oppress us [By the tariff], WHETHER WE SHALL REMAIN UNITED OR NOT.<sup>14</sup>

Again, many newspapers and resolutions passed at public meetings urged the masses to practice a "rigid economy" in order to counteract the operation of the tariff. Non-consumption of articles manufactured "north of the Potomac," as well as home manufacture of as many "family articles" as practicable, were suggested as modes of protest.<sup>15</sup> Many "ardent patriots," among them politicians, began to wear "homespun." One writer, recalling the Campaign of 1828, declared that Preston campaigned for the legislature "in a complete suit of homespun."<sup>16</sup>

While softer modes of resistance, such as "non-consumption" were being urged, the search for an ultimate remedy proceeded apace. On June 12, at a "large and respectable meeting of the inhabitants of Colleton District," Robert Barnwell Rhett submitted an address to the people of South Carolina for adoption.<sup>17</sup> This document, known as the "Colleton Address," boldly advocated "resistance to the law." It contended: "According to our humble conception, the constitutional

<sup>14</sup>Quoted, ibid., 62.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 60-64; Boucher, Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 21.

<sup>16</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit. (November, 1899), 529. Interestingly, the same writer recalled that Preston "also shot at a mark with a Sand-Hill voter for a water-milin, as the Sand-Hills called it, and won the bet--outshot the Sand-Hills."

<sup>17</sup>Charleston Mercury, June 18, 1828.

grounds upon which our fathers resisted the pretensions of the British Crown are weak and trivial, when compared with those upon which we now stand."<sup>18</sup> Resistance was advised, "not from a desire of disunion," affirmed the document, but to bring the Constitution back "to its original principles." The address was unanimously adopted and Governor John Taylor was enjoined to call a special session of the legislature so that concrete action might be taken.<sup>19</sup> Taylor stood firm, however, declaring that there was not sufficient "unanimity of desire" among the people for a special session. According to Gaillard Hunt the "Colleton Address" marked "a distinct stage in the advance toward nullification."<sup>20</sup>

In the meantime, efforts were being made to formulate "a constitutional doctrine of resistance." The first of a series of three articles from "Sidney" appeared in the Charleston Mercury on July 3. The burden of the "Sidney" writings was that "South Carolina, standing upon her sovereignty, could declare the tariff laws null and void, remain passive, and compel the general government to move." If South Carolina could have one-fourth of the states on her side, argued the writer, she would be safe. Three-fourths must "declare to the contrary." If the majority should attempt to enforce "what is not law,"

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<sup>18</sup>Laura A. White, Robert Barnwell Rhett: Father of Secession (New York, 1931), 16-17; Perritt, "Robert Barnwell Rhett: South Carolina Secession Spokesman," loc. cit., 44.

<sup>19</sup>Houston, A Study of Nullification in South Carolina, 74-75.

<sup>20</sup>Gaillard Hunt, "South Carolina During the Nullification Struggle," Political Science Quarterly, VI (1891), 236.

the cause of the majority would then be "a glorious one."<sup>21</sup>

It remained to Calhoun, however, to develop a closely reasoned constitutional doctrine of resistance. Calhoun believed the tariff "the most dangerous question that has ever sprung up under our system."<sup>22</sup> At the same time, he advised moderation until the national election in November had been determined. As stated by Wiltse:

Though he was convinced that no appeal to Congress, with its fixed tariff majority in both Houses, would be fruitful, he still hoped that Jackson would use the influence and power of his office to bring about a reduction. Beyond that many lines were open, but most of them meant forcible resistance, which he was unwilling to accept. The remedy must be constitutional as well as effective; and to find it, Calhoun turned his great powers of analysis and his abundant energy to a re-examination of the Constitution.<sup>23</sup>

But for the urging of Preston, however, Calhoun might not--at least at this time--have proceeded to formulate the finely-spun constitutional remedy which found expression in the famous Exposition. During the summer and fall of 1828, many political leaders sought the counsel of Calhoun at his Fort Hill home.<sup>24</sup> "Calhoun freely stated his views as at last determined by the tariff of abominations, and likewise his fear that the conduct of Jackson's supporters was such as to preclude hope of relief through Congress."<sup>25</sup> Among those who

<sup>21</sup>Houston, A Study of Nullification in South Carolina, 75-76.

<sup>22</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, XXXV (September 20, 1828), 61.

<sup>23</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nationalist, I, 378.

<sup>24</sup>Houston, A Study of Nullification in South Carolina, 79.

<sup>25</sup>Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 430.

visited Calhoun was Preston, who requested that Calhoun prepare a formal document for the guidance of the new legislature, delineating the wrongs done the State of South Carolina and the "possible means of redress."<sup>26</sup>

In a highly significant letter written to Preston on November 6, Calhoun declared that he was prepared to comply with the request.<sup>27</sup> "Believing as I do, that the liberty and happiness of our country depend upon the course which our State may take at this great juncture, I am prepared," Calhoun wrote, "to contribute whatever may be in my

<sup>26</sup>Ibid. It is to be noted that a number of writers fall into the error of assuming that Preston was at this time a member of a legislative committee appointed at the previous session of the legislature to prepare "an exposition of grievances and a protest against the tariff for consideration at the next session." Preston was, in fact, not a member of such a committee, although he evidently did have reason to believe in the fall of 1828 that he would be appointed to the Committee on Federal Relations when the new legislature met. As Calhoun wrote in what was really his autobiography: "So deep was his [Calhoun's] conviction of the danger [of the tariff bill], that when he was requested by one of the members elected to the Legislature of South Carolina [Preston], with whom he had conversed freely on a visit to him, and who expected to be on the Committee of Federal Relations, to give him his views on the subject, he did not hesitate to draw them up in the shape of a report. . . ." R. M. T. Hunter [putative author], Life of John C. Calhoun Presenting A Condensed History of Political Events From 1811 to 1843 (New York, 1843), 36. Among the writers who err on this point are: Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 430; Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nationalist, I, 379; and Houston, A Study of Nullification in South Carolina, 79. Bancroft, however, correctly refers to Preston as "a prospective member of the South Carolina Committee on federal relations. . . ." Bancroft, Calhoun and Nullification, 38.

<sup>27</sup>Calhoun to Preston, Pendleton, South Carolina, November 6, 1828, in David Rankin Barbee (ed.), "A Sheaf of Old Letters," Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine, XXXII (October, 1950), 90-92. This letter, a part of a collection belonging to Major W. B. Lewis, was first published August 24, 1863, in the New York Times, which received it from "A correspondent" in Nashville, Tennessee, who signed himself "C.V.S."

power, to aid in giving a salutary direction to her Council." The "particular duty" which Preston had requested of him was "one of the highest importance, and no small difficulty." The document "must necessarily be voluminous--so many and so important are the principles involved, and so various are the details." Continuing, Calhoun declared:

I have but a short period to remain at home, and I am much engaged in my domestic concerns . . . but I will permit nothing to prevent me from sending on such aid that my friends may think I ought. I will commence a draft immediately. . . .<sup>28</sup>

Calhoun requested Preston to furnish him with a copy of the Kentucky Resolutions and a statement of the imports and exports "for the last five years, distinguishing in the latter the articles of rice, cotton and tobacco."

In earlier communications with Calhoun, Preston had evidently suggested nullification as the proper remedy for the state's wrongs, for Calhoun wrote:

Your views appear to me to be perfectly correct. Excise will not do. I deem it the most dangerous recourse that could be adopted, and would certainly be followed by defeat. The remedy you refer to [state interposition] is the only safe and efficient one, and is abundantly adequate. I speak with confidence. It alone can save the Union. The only question is the mode and time.<sup>29</sup>

For his new lieutenant Calhoun had a number of suggestions as to procedure--suggestions which he offered "with deference, knowing how much must depend on circumstances, which can only be judged of by those on the spot." The state must act, he said, "by Convention," but

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.



"we must take time." Moreover, one big principle should be carefully observed. "All moves aiming at reform and revolution as ours is, must, to be successful, be characterized by great respect for the opinions of others." Non-consumption of dutiable goods as well as home production of dutiable articles, while they seem "judicious," Calhoun advised, must yet be regarded as no more than "a temporary palliative." His final injunction to Preston was:

It seems to me all that can be done at present is an able report, fully exposing our wrongs, and unfolding our remedies, but to abstain for the present from applying it, on grounds of respect for others and a sense of moderation, with the adoption of such measures as may produce harmony of opinion among the oppressed States.<sup>30</sup>

The result of Calhoun's labors was a carefully reasoned document which expounded the doctrine of nullification. This doctrine, as Calhoun developed it, is in essence as follows:

The great and leading principle is, that the general government emanated from the people of the several States,

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<sup>30</sup>Preston appears to have moved into Calhoun's camp as early as 1826, though he was at that time not active, at least publicly, in South Carolina politics. Thomas Cooper, speculating in 1826 on the political course which William Harper would be likely to take in Congress, wrote to Mahlon Dickerson: "I think . . . [Harper] inclined to go all length with the Administration in favor of internal improvements and against State-rights, provided Calhoun does not lead him. But as Harper's brother in law here, Col. [William C.] Preston, is gained over by Calhoun, I think Harper will follow that leader also. . . ." Cooper to Dickerson, Columbia, S. C., March 16, 1826, "Letters of Dr. Thomas Cooper, 1825-1832," The American Historical Review, VI (October, 1900-July, 1901), 728. In a letter to Waddy Thompson on the same subject, Preston declared that Harper's opinions were "at once national & southern." "He seems to me therefore a fit person to face the State about at Washington and make it present a resolute & temperate front against this reckless corrupt & ruinous administration." Preston to Thompson, Columbia, S. C., March 28, 1826, Waddy Thompson Papers, Caroliniana Library.



forming distinct political communities, and acting in their separate and sovereign capacity, and not from all of the people forming one aggregate political community; that the Constitution of the United States is, in fact, a compact, to which each State is a party, in the character already described; and that the several States, or parties, have a right to judge of its infractions; and in case of a deliberate, palpable, and dangerous exercise of power not delegated, they have the right, in the last resort (to use the language of the Virginia Resolutions), "to interpose for arresting the progress of the evil, and for maintaining, within their respective limits the authorities, rights, and liberties appertaining to them."<sup>31</sup>

Going further, Calhoun explained the manner in which the doctrine should be exercised. If, in the opinion of a state, dangerous infractions of the Constitution are in evidence, then it would be competent for the state, acting in her sovereign capacity, in a convention assembled for the purpose, to declare the acts complained of, "null and void," and not binding upon her citizens.<sup>32</sup>

Armed with the closely reasoned remedy of the Exposition and a firm conviction that it offered the best mode of resistance to the pressures of the protectionists, Preston took his seat in the legislature on November 24. He was not unaware of the difficulties that he would face in carrying the House on a call for convention. Since the State Rights party was better organized than the Union party, the advantage lay on its side. On the other hand, some of the State Rights members were known to favor moderation, so that Congress might be given the opportunity to ameliorate the oppressive tariff laws. At any rate, the State Rights party was "a distinct party," while the

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<sup>31</sup>John C. Calhoun, The Works of John Caldwell Calhoun, 6 vols. (New York, 1851-1856), VI, 60.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 160.

opponents were, properly speaking, "a mere opposition."<sup>33</sup>

A violent legislative battle was clearly imminent. In his message to the legislature retiring Governor Taylor sounded the battle cry. In his opinion, it was the legislature's duty "to declare, as representatives of the people of the State of South Carolina, that there has been, by congress, 'a deliberate, palpable, and dangerous exercise of powers not granted by the compact.'" To put down "the usurpation," the legislature should use every means afforded "by the constitution and laws of the land."<sup>34</sup> Not less determined in spirit was the inaugural address of the new Governor, Stephen D. Miller. "In swearing to support the constitution of the United States, I do not regard myself," he said, "as acknowledging allegiance to an unconstitutional act of congress. Acquiescence in such legislation must be considered a matter of convenience and not of duty: Resistance to it involves alone the question of policy and not of crime. . . ."<sup>35</sup>

Preston's real work began on November 25, when he was appointed-- as he had anticipated--to a special committee "on that portion of the Governor's Message . . . as relates to the Tariff." The committee was composed of Preston, as Chairman, "Mr. Legare, Mr. Cook, Mr. R. Barnwell Smith, Mr. Nixon, and Mr. Waddy Thompson, Jr."<sup>36</sup>

The special committee immediately began deliberations, and each

<sup>33</sup>Hunt, "South Carolina During the Nullification Struggle," loc. cit., 238.

<sup>34</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, December 8, 1828.

<sup>35</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, XXXV (January 3, 1829), 304.

<sup>36</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 5, 1828.

member formulated a set of resolutions. Preston's resolutions, most trenchant of all, echoed the leading principle of Calhoun's Exposition and affirmed that the legislature should interpose its sovereignty immediately to arrest the usurpations of the Federal power:

1. Resolved, That all duties imposed by congress, on imposts, not for revenue but to control the industry of the country, are unconstitutional.
2. Resolved, That the acts commonly called the tariff laws passed in 1824 and 1828, for the encouragement of manufactures, are deliberate, palpable and dangerous infractions of the constitution.
3. Resolved, That those laws are partial and oppressive in their operations upon the southern states, and more particularly upon this state; and in their consequences calculated to produce the ruin of one section of the country--to corrupt the public morals of another, and to destroy the liberties of all.
4. Resolved, That the states when their reserved rights are palpably, deliberately, and dangerously violated by the general government, have, under the constitution, the right, acting in their high sovereign capacity, to interpose and arrest the usurpation.
5. Resolved, That it is the deliberate opinion of this legislature, that, to defend and protect the constitution of the United States in its true meaning, to preserve unimpaired, the reserved rights of this state, and to protect its citizens from impending ruin, such interposition is now necessary.
6. Resolved, That a committee of \_\_\_\_\_ be raised to devise and report such measures as may be best calculated to carry into effect the foregoing resolutions.<sup>37</sup>

All the members of the special committee were agreed that the protective principle was oppressive and unjust. The majority also believed it unconstitutional. There was little unanimity, however,

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<sup>37</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, XXXV (January 3, 1829), 304.

on the question of the most effective course of action to be pursued.<sup>38</sup> Preston's crucial fifth resolution, expressing the extreme State Rights view, demanded immediate interposition. Legare, the leader of the Unionists, believed on the other hand, that "a solemn protest" against the principles of the tariff would be sufficient. Moreover, no convention ought to be called; neither should any acts be passed "to 'nullify' the laws in South Carolina. . . ."

Battle lines were drawn by December 2, when the special committee submitted its various propositions to the House. The outcome was doubtful. The Mercury's Columbia correspondent wrote: "It is, of course, utterly impossible to say to which of these various schemes the Legislature will incline. I fear great confusion will arise from the conflict of so many opposite propositions, and from the diversity of opinion in relation to the best mode of proceeding."<sup>39</sup>

On December 2, the House resolved itself into Committee of the Whole and proceeded to a consideration of the tariff question, which

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<sup>38</sup>Thompson believed that the legislature should make a "full exposition" of the state's wrongs "and the appropriate and only remedy--a remedy which a deep solicitude for the preservation of our government alone, prevents us from now adopting." Rhett suggested that (1) resolutions of protest be again sent to Congress; (2) the legislature be convened again should Congress fail to recede from protectionism; (3) a committee be appointed to prepare an address to the people of the United States "on the existing differences between the State and the general government, relative to the tariff laws." Nixon urged: "If the tariff law is not repealed or modified, at the present session of Congress, so as to relieve the state from unconstitutional oppression, that we recommend to the people to appoint delegates to meet in convention, at Columbia, on the \_\_\_ day of \_\_\_ next, to devise such means of redress as the crisis demands." Niles' Weekly Register, XXXV (January 3, 1829), 304-305; Charleston Mercury, December 5, 1828.

<sup>39</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 5, 1828.

was made the special order of the day.<sup>40</sup> The protracted debate, which continued for two weeks, was characterized by the Mercury's Columbia correspondent as "desultory, tumultuous, and full of excitement."<sup>41</sup> The "excitement," as H Ezekiah Niles explained, was occasioned by the extreme position taken by Preston, who assumed leadership of the State Rights faction, favoring immediate resistance through a people's convention.<sup>42</sup> Lack of unanimity among the State Rights wing added fresh fuel to the legislature's proceedings. Calhoun's strongest influence was registered, not through Preston, but through Rhett, who, though affirming the tariff laws "direct aggression on the rights and sovereignty of the States," nevertheless argued that the legislature should give Congress further opportunity to deliberate the oppressive tariff laws. Legare, the champion of the "union and peace" party, not only denied the validity of the basic premises of Calhoun's Exposition, but also assailed the Preston argument that immediate interposition should be effected, declaring that the people of the state were not prepared to come into "open and violent collision with their fellow citizens" before time was given for further argument on the subject.<sup>43</sup>

Preston, in contending for immediate constitutional resistance,

<sup>40</sup>Journals of the House, 1828, 31.

<sup>41</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 16, 1828.

<sup>42</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, XXXIV (January 3, 1829), 309.

<sup>43</sup>For Legare's arguments, see Christophersen, "A Rhetorical Study of Hugh Swinton Legare: South Carolina Unionist," loc. cit., 163-170.



faced the opposition of not only the conservative element of the State Rights group, but also the forces of the Union party. In support of his crucial fifth resolution he argued that the state should nullify the tariff laws in order: (1) to preserve the integrity of the constitution; (2) to protect the state's reserved powers; and (3) to prevent economic disaster in the South. He rested the practicability of nullification upon four contentions: (1) that it could be sustained legally; (2) that other Southern states would support South Carolina in their action; (3) that South Carolina, not given the cooperation of the other Southern states, could act alone with success; and (4) that the people of the state were ready to try the issue through the strongest constitutional measures. Therefore, a people's convention should be called immediately.<sup>44</sup>

Preston put forth his greatest effort, however, on December 13, two days before the proceedings of the House closed. In a heated debate, which continued into the evening hours, Preston is reported to have "occupied the attention of the Committee [of the Whole]" for a considerable time, in a truly eloquent, able, manly, and energetic speech in which he again supported his resolutions, and replied to the arguments of several of his opponents."<sup>45</sup> Frederick Porcher, a young planter of Somerton, journeyed to Columbia to hear Preston's speech for a convention because, as he wrote, Preston "had at that time

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<sup>44</sup>These arguments are gathered from the sketchy accounts of the House proceedings carried in the Charleston Mercury, December 8, 10, 11, and 13, 1828.

<sup>45</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 16, 1828.



the reputation of being the greatest orator not only in South Carolina, but in the country." He "reached Columbia too late," however, missing Preston's greatest effort. But before the legislature adjourned, he managed to hear Preston, whose mien and delivery he described in his Memoirs. "He was tall," Porcher wrote, "perhaps over six feet in height, with a pleasant face, but not a handsome one. His person was rather awkward, he wore a wig, and very often a spirited gesticulation would terminate in the adjustment of this adjunct."

Porcher also entered his observations on Preston's use of voice:

His voice was very sweet, but when excited it was occasionally hoarse and harsh. His utterance was rapid, he never hesitated for a word, and it was curious sometimes to observe how he would unravel himself out of a most complicated and apparently inextricably involved sentence.<sup>46</sup>

Final proceedings on the tariff question took place on December 15. The resolution calling for a convention was lost by a vote of 80 to 41. Preston voted for this resolution, and against a substitute motion affirming the expediency of entering "a solemn protest" against the tariff laws, which was carried by a vote of 82 to 36. The latter motion, as amended, read as follows:

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<sup>46</sup>Samuel Gaillard Stoney (ed.), "The Memoirs of Frederick Adolphus Porcher," South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine, XLVI (January, 1945), 79-80. Porcher's characterization of the South Carolina legislature is also deserving of notice. Contrasting the decorous legislature of Connecticut with that of his own state, he says: "In ours all was apparent confusion; half or more than half of the members had on their hats. It was not uncommon to see a member seated with his feet resting upon the table before him. Groups of men would be seen collected about some of the tables; but the scene around the chimneys was calculated to amaze one. There sat men utterly heedless of the business, engaged in all sorts of conversation. And the Senate had nothing to boast of in this respect over the House. It was some time before I could reconcile myself to this utter want of decorum."

Resolved, That it is expedient to make our solemn protest against the unconstitutionality and oppressive operation of the system of protecting duties--also to have such protest entered on the journals of the senate of the United States--and to make a public exposition of our wrongs, and of the remedies within our power, to be communicated to our sister states, with a request that they will cooperate with this state in procuring a repeal of the tariffs for protection, and an abandonment of the principle, and, if they be not repealed, to co-operate with us in such measures as may be necessary for arresting the evil.

Resolved, That a committee of seven be raised to carry the foregoing resolution into effect.

Preston gave his vote for the amended substitute motion, which was carried, 97 to 21.<sup>47</sup>

But Preston's work was not over. He was appointed to the Committee of Seven along with Legare, Hayne, Rhett, Gregg, Wardlaw, and Elliot.<sup>48</sup> This committee, using as a basis the Calhoun manuscript Exposition,<sup>49</sup> prepared an exposition of the state's grievances, and a formal protest,<sup>50</sup> both of which were sent not only to Washington but also to the several Southern governors.<sup>51</sup> This paper was reported to the House on December 18, and five thousand copies were ordered printed.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup>Journals of the House, 1828, 127-129; Niles' Weekly Register, XXXV (January 3, 1829), 306-307.

<sup>48</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, XXXV (January 3, 1829), 307.

<sup>49</sup>Hunter, The Life of John C. Calhoun, 36.

<sup>50</sup>One writer argues from significant evidence that Legare was the author of the Protest. Christopherson, "Hugh Swinton Legare: South Carolina Unionist," loc. cit., 173.

<sup>51</sup>Boucher, The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 36.

<sup>52</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nationalist, I, 389.

Certain significant questions are prompted by Preston's throwing his rhetorical powers on the side of immediate constitutional resistance. First of all, why did he not heed Calhoun's advice to "abstain" from immediate application of the extreme remedy? Second, why did not the House choose to adopt the course Preston urged? Stated in other terms, what were the factors operating to vitiate his arguments?

The answer to the first question resides in Preston's unshakeable faith in the remedy he prescribed. He believed it the only effective method of resisting the protective principle. In 1830, he told his constituents:

When I introduced those [1829] Resolutions, I was solemnly impressed with the conviction, that the interposition of the State to arrest the unconstitutional measures of the general government could alone preserve our liberties and the Union.<sup>53</sup>

He also had his reasons for flying in the face of Calhoun's counsel. He stated:

I thought that . . . [The state] should interpose at once, for I foresaw that if the discussion were protracted, angry feelings would be engendered on both sides, warm partisans would mutually push each other to extremes; and amidst the conflict, the Union, heretofore never mentioned without veneration, would be drawn into common and familiar discussion, like any other question of temporary expediency.<sup>54</sup>

But why did Preston's rhetorical efforts fail to secure acceptance of the action he urged upon his colleagues? One of the ablest orators of the House, Preston evidently argued cogently for

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<sup>53</sup>Columbia Southern Times and State Gazette, August 9, 1830.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

immediate interposition. At the end of the tariff debates, a member of the House wrote the Mercury:

In the course of the debates a degree of eloquence and sound reasoning has been exhibited, that would honor any Legislature. I will only particularize Messrs. Preston and Legare--the former, the champion of that party who are disposed to nullify the Tariff Law without delay. . . .<sup>55</sup>

It is hardly possible to evaluate fully the appropriateness of Preston's "argumentative adaptation."<sup>56</sup> Yet it is possible to isolate certain powerful counter influences operating to deflect the bare contentions of his case for immediate nullification. First, the cry that such action necessarily implied disunion proved a potent obstacle to the acceptance of Preston's line of argument. The assertion was familiar to the ears of every member of the House, long before the Union party orators urged it in legislative debate. Throughout the summer and fall the moderate newspapers of the state had advised that "open resistance" to the Tariff laws could only result in disunion.<sup>57</sup> At this point in South Carolina's history, the charge of disunion placed a strong stigma on the argument for immediate interposition. Indeed, the editor of the Columbia Telescope believed that the "majority of the house" had agreed "to forbear a little longer" simply "to avoid the possibility of the most disastrous catastrophe."<sup>58</sup> Thus, devotion to

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<sup>55</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 16, 1828.

<sup>56</sup>For a challenging discussion of this aspect of rhetorical research, see Albert J. Croft, "The Functions of Rhetorical Criticism," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLII (October, 1956), 286-290.

<sup>57</sup>Boucher, The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 14-25.

<sup>58</sup>Quoted in Niles' Weekly Register, XXXV (January 3, 1829), 309.

the Union proved a most unwieldy obstacle to Preston. Besides, his cause was severely damaged by Calhoun, whose apprehension that the legislature would adopt a drastic course of action, kept him in South Carolina until the outcome of the debates was certain.<sup>59</sup>

Preston, nevertheless, was South Carolina's leading spokesman for a convention of the people. The course adopted by the legislature had proved a disappointment to him, but he had faith that his bold course would be sanctioned at the end of a year. To an anonymous correspondent, he confided his sentiments:

The proceedings of the Legislature . . . were far short of my wishes and of what I trust will be done at the next session-- In truth we are prepared for a very decisive course--and would at once adopt it if we were permitted to hope for the cooperation of the Southern States, especially of Virginia. Many in this State (I am not of them) think that we are not sufficiently strong to act alone--but if we could be assured that Virginia would act with us--we would take such steps next winter as will make the refusal of the Tariff the easiest alternative for Congress.<sup>60</sup>

Preston's hopes, however, proved too sanguine. There was too little agreement on the doctrine of nullification and, for that matter, even on the doctrine of state rights. A sizeable percentage of men in the state were as yet quite nationalistic in their political leanings and, "among those who were reckoned adherents of a pure state-rights belief there were many who, deep in their hearts, did not believe in the doctrine implicitly, but supported it because they thought it best

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<sup>59</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nationalist, I, 389.

<sup>60</sup>Preston to unknown correspondent, Columbia, South Carolina, n.d., William Campbell Preston Papers, Caroliniana Library.



for the state and the South under the circumstances."<sup>61</sup>

As events proved, not one, but two years would elapse before Preston could throw the full weight of his zeal and eloquence behind a call for a convention. The year 1829 was one of relative calm. Jackson's inaugural address served to reduce Southern excitement. Warren R. Davis, a member of Congress from South Carolina, wrote, "The tone of the president's inaugural address, I think is calculated to sooth the too justly excited feelings of the South; and his private conversations and expressed opinions are still more satisfactory to myself."<sup>62</sup> Also, various legislative measures inimical to Southern interests were voted down in Congress. Moreover, 1829 was not an election year in South Carolina--a fact which augured well for calmer proceedings. Still more important, perhaps, was Calhoun's belief that his doctrine of nullification was "to be put into action only as a last rasort when all other means had failed."<sup>63</sup>

In the legislative session of 1829, Preston continued his work as chairman of a special committee of seven on "Relations with the General Government,"<sup>64</sup> which was the forerunner of a standing committee established in 1830 as the "Committee on Federal Relations." He also participated frequently in debate, lending his voice to a

<sup>61</sup>Boucher, The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 42-43.

<sup>62</sup>Greenville Mountaineer, March 10, 1829.

<sup>63</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, II, 53.

<sup>64</sup>Journals of the House, 1829, 41. The committee was composed of Preston, Gregg, Hayne, Elliot, Smith, Toomer, and Wardlaw.



measure introduced by Rhett "to request . . . [South Carolina's] Representatives in Congress to oppose any appropriations for internal improvement."<sup>65</sup> Equally important to Preston, also, were the legislative proceedings of South Carolina's sister states, Georgia and Virginia, whose legislatures adopted resolutions affirming:

The constitution of the United States, being a federative compact between sovereign states, in construing which no common arbiter is known, each state has a right to construe the compact for herself.<sup>66</sup>

But whether a convention could be called at the next session of the South Carolina legislature was indeed problematical. Much depended upon the state elections of 1830.

The Unionists managed, with shrewdness, to place the campaign on a "union or disunion" basis, forcing the Nullifiers to wage their attack through quicksand. One militant Columbia editor, a Preston supporter, cried, "Let the individual be pointed out who proclaims himself in favor of a dissolution of the Union, and we ourselves will assist to stamp the mark upon his forehead."<sup>67</sup> Preston openly proclaimed himself an enemy of consolidation before the campaign began. At the anniversary celebration of St. Patrick's Benevolent Society in March he offered the following toast: "The Whig spirit of Ireland-- prompt to resist oppression, impatient of wrong--may her sons be free

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<sup>65</sup>Rhett's resolutions were sustained by a vote of 99 to 21. Washington National Intelligencer, December 14, 25, 1829.

<sup>66</sup>Quoted in Niles' Weekly Register, XXXVI (April 18, 1830), 114.

<sup>67</sup>Columbia Southern Times and State Gazette, June 17, 1830.

in the land of their birth and the land of their choice."<sup>68</sup> At the height of the campaign, Preston declared in a public letter:

I believe that the State can peaceably and constitutionally arrest the Tariff laws. I believe she ought to do so decidedly and at once. . . . I shall, . . . if I have the honor of a seat in the Legislature, vote for referring these most important matters to the people in Convention. . .<sup>69</sup>

Despite the stigma of being a disunionist Preston was returned to his seat in the legislature, fervently resolving that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against South Carolina."<sup>70</sup>

Preston resumed his seat in the House on November 22, 1830,<sup>71</sup> determined to test the strength of the Nullifiers, who now held a majority in both Houses. Accordingly, he reported on December 4, from the "Committee on Federal Relations," a set of resolutions which concluded as follows:

Resolved, That the State having long submitted to the evil [of the Tariff laws] in the hope of redress from the wisdom and justice of the Federal Government doth no longer perceive any ground to entertain such hopes and therefore, that it is necessary and expedient that a convention of the people of the State be assembled to meet, on the adjournment of the ensuing session of the Congress of the United States, for the purpose of taking into consideration the said violation of the Constitutional Compact and devising the mode and measures of redress.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Columbia Southern Times, March 18, 1830. The Southern Times and the South Carolina State Gazette were united under the title, Columbia Southern Times and State Gazette on July 8, 1830.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., July 2, 1830.

<sup>70</sup>Columbia Southern Times, July 5, 1830.

<sup>71</sup>Journals of the House, 1830, 3.

<sup>72</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 6, 1830. Rhett, also a determined Nullifier, was at this time a member of the committee that framed the resolutions. In the House, however, Preston led the battle of the State Rights orators for a convention call.

Daniel Huger, a Unionist leader, offered an amendment to Preston's resolutions which, in essence, affirmed that if the Tariff Acts of 1824 and 1828 were not ameliorated or repealed by Congress, the Governor of South Carolina should be authorized "to take all steps necessary to a convention of the aggrieved States, for such redress as they should see proper."<sup>73</sup>

Preston's major effort in support of a convention began on December 10 and was concluded the next day. His audience was vast, consisting, wrote James H. Thornwell, a junior at South Carolina College, of "the college, House, and all who could get near enough. . ."<sup>74</sup> He spoke "for two hours and a quarter" on the first day in reply to Huger,<sup>75</sup> and for one and a half hours the second day.<sup>76</sup>

Preston was "well prepared," wrote the Mercury's Columbia correspondent, "and took a very comprehensive and interesting view of the usurpations of the Federal Government."<sup>77</sup> During the course of his prolonged effort, he

discussed the unconstitutionality and injustice of the American System, with great effect--adverted to the doctrine of nullification, and maintained it with considerable force and ingenuity--strongly contended for the necessity of some decisive measure in order to sustain the honor and dignity of the State; and concluded

<sup>73</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 20, 1830.

<sup>74</sup>James H. Thornwell, "Semi-Centennial Address Delivered Before the Societies of South Carolina College, December, 1856." Thornwell Papers, Caroliniana Library. Cited hereafter as Thornwell, "Semi-Centennial Address."

<sup>75</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 14, 1830.

<sup>76</sup>Kibler, Benjamin F. Perry, 102.

<sup>77</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 17, 1830.

by giving his views in relation to what he believed a Convention should do.<sup>78</sup>

A convention, Preston argued in his peroration, should decide upon the "single isolated question": "Whether the . . . [Tariff] was or was not constitutional." If such a convention should find it unconstitutional, it should then "refer the whole subject back, together with their decision, to the Legislature for their deliberation and final action upon it."<sup>79</sup>

The "Agitation of the State," Preston urged, required that some decisive action be taken. Challenging his highly attentive hearers, he finished with energy:

Let the people decide upon their rights--let them determine in solemn form whether they have or have not been aggrieved--whether the Federal Government have been acting within the legitimate scope of their authority, in the passage of the Tariff Laws,--whether the reserved rights of South Carolina as a sovereign State, have been trampled on and violated, and what course it is incumbent upon her, for the preservation of her honor, her dignity, and her liberties, to pursue.<sup>80</sup>

After almost four hours of speaking, Preston had not covered the "whole ground" in debate. By previous agreement, however, Butler and Rhett were next put forward to counter the remaining Unionist arguments.<sup>81</sup>

Abundant evidence indicates that Preston's speech was one of

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid. The official stenographer was unable to report the complete text of this speech inasmuch as "it was almost impossible to follow the fervid and rapid stream of Preston's eloquence."

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

unusual technical merit. It evoked a stream of encomium from both Union and State Rights quarters. B. F. Perry, the Unionist editor of the Greenville Mountaineer, was profoundly impressed. "His speech, from beginning to end," Perry wrote, "was a most powerful and eloquent one. Never did I listen with a more thrilling effect to the speech of anyone. Col. Preston is certainly an able debater, and would be distinguished in any legislative body in the world."<sup>82</sup> One of the Mercury's correspondents declared, "I have heard much fine speaking, but certainly never listened to anything like this. It is said to be equal to any speech that he [Preston] ever made, except his celebrated defence of Judge James, which threw his entire audience into tears."<sup>83</sup> Still another critic pronounced Preston's effort "one of the ablest speeches ever delivered here or elsewhere." In this critic's judgment:

It was, throughout, a master-piece in regard to all the qualities necessary to give to a speech the character of greatness and power. With an easy, flowing, and uncommonly chaste and delightful elocution--with a graceful, imposing, and highly impressive appearance and manner--with a force of argument, and an irresistible and continued strain of the most thrilling eloquence, he at once delighted and instructed a large and attentive audience of both sexes, for five or six hours.<sup>84</sup>

Finally, another writer, a member of the House, reported that Preston's speech "was considered by all" as "an effort of no ordinary nature--as more deservedly entitling him to the reputation of a brilliant man and distinguished orator, than any speech ever heretofore delivered by him."<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup>Greenville Mountaineer, December 17, 1830.

<sup>83</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 14, 1830.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., December 17, 1830.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.



Preston's speech was adjudged not only a brilliant instance of rhetorical craftsmanship and presentation, but also as a highly effective communicative effort. Speaking of the immediate response to Preston's rhetorical objective, James Thornwell recalled in 1856 that he and his college friends "left the hall detesting the tariff and with the firm conviction that as for us we would nullify or die."<sup>86</sup>

Able though it was, Preston's effort failed to gain legislative endorsement of his bold proposal. Nevertheless, the forces for nullification were not without certain successes. Their leading measure had failed, but they were able to secure the adoption of a set of six resolutions, the last of which recognized the right of a state to nullify a Federal law. The official organ of the Nullifiers asserted that the passage of this resolution "is considered as an overwhelming triumph, on the part of the Republicans."<sup>87</sup> This represented, as Boucher points out, "at least a positive step in advance of the legislative proceedings of 1828."<sup>88</sup> The end result of the battle in the legislature was that the State Rights party was obliged to bide its time once again.

The legislature hesitated on the edge of nullification for much the same reasons that it had done so in 1828. The stigma of disunion still clung to the measure which called for a convention, and

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<sup>86</sup>Thornwell, "Semi-Centennial Address."

<sup>87</sup>Columbia Southern Times and State Gazette, December 17, 1830.

<sup>88</sup>Boucher, The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 106.



the State Rights party was itself divided.<sup>89</sup> At this juncture the State Rights party was composed of a diversity of views which ranged from the conservative, represented by Calhoun, to the radical, represented by Rhett, "who was preaching revolution." Between these extremes was the view (held by those like Langdon Cheves) that South Carolina should secede if the other Southern states would follow suit. Calhoun, who still hoped for amelioration of the tariff laws by Congress, withheld his support from his impatient disciples.

During the few months of lull which followed the adjournment of the legislature, Preston threw his oratorical powers into an attempt to win a Congressional seat. According to James H. Hammond, editor of the Southern Times, some of Preston's friends endeavored to dissuade him from making the campaign on the ground that he would be "more serviceable to the country in his present position." Hammond also observed that Preston "hesitated long before he yielded to the wishes and opinions of the more numerous body of those who solicited him to come forward."<sup>91</sup> Since Preston's opponent, John M. Felder, was a declared anti-conventionist, the outcome of the contest was not without interest to the contending parties of the state.

When the spirited campaign ended in April, Felder was the victor "by a very handsome (260) majority." Unionist papers emulated in the outcome. The Charleston Courier pronounced the Felder victory

<sup>89</sup>Columbia Southern Times and State Gazette, December 17, 1830.

<sup>90</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, II, 87.

<sup>91</sup>Columbia Southern Times and State Gazette, March 30, 1831.

"one of the greatest triumphs which has been achieved by the Union and State Rights party since the odious doctrine of nullification was first broached among us." The campaign, claimed the Courier:

has been one purely of principle. Mr. Preston, the opponent of Major F[elder] is a highly talented and popular man: but the yeomanry of the heart of the State have, notwithstanding, decided . . . that they are opposed to the doctrines which he would inculcate.<sup>92</sup>

The Camden Journal offered a similar analysis of the election, which, it affirmed, was an "index of the noisy doctrines of the day."

Mr. Preston, a man of brilliant abilities and acknowledged excellence of private character, has been fairly beaten, in the very focus of violent principles. It is a fair triumph of rationality in South Carolina. . . .<sup>93</sup>

Though Preston had lost, he was not thrown off his course. Immediately following the election, he attended a public dinner in Columbia, where he made "an eloquent avowal of the principles which have directed his political conduct."<sup>94</sup> Preston was now avowedly one of the most talented of the Nullifiers, to whose strong doctrines he was fully committed, for good or for ill. Moreover, his loyal supporters, centered chiefly in Columbia, were convinced that South Carolina would in time elevate him to stations of higher political honor. One of their number predicted that "his brilliant talents and noble spirit, though confined to a narrower [sphere] will still be

<sup>92</sup>Charleston Courier, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, April 29, 1831.

<sup>93</sup>Camden Journal, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, May 7, 1831.

<sup>94</sup>Columbia Southern Times and State Gazette, April 23, 1831.

exerted in a more useful sphere of patriotism."<sup>95</sup> The prediction had a reasonable fulfillment two years later when Preston was awarded a seat beside Calhoun in the United States Senate. Preston's role in the closing scenes of the nullification controversy had much to do with elevating him to the Senate.

Before the legislature met in 1831, Preston had another opportunity to succor the cause of the convention wing of the State Rights party. In June, he was appointed an official delegate to an anti-tariff convention,<sup>96</sup> which held sessions in Philadelphia from September 30 to October 6, and was attended by representatives from fifteen states.<sup>97</sup> He was one of the most active of South Carolina's twenty delegates. He gave his half-hearted support, moreover, to the measures adopted by the Convention, which provided for the preparation of a memorial to Congress urging the "adoption of a more liberal [Tariff] policy," and for an address to the people of the United States giving an exposition of "the evils of the Tariff."<sup>98</sup> He had not, however, the slightest hope that such anemic measures could effect a modification of the tariff which would be favorable to the South. The proceedings of the Philadelphia gathering merely served to temper his long-held conviction that only through state interposition could the protectionists be jarred awake. The decisive movement, he felt, could

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, July 22, 1831.

<sup>97</sup>Boucher, The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 113.

<sup>98</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 5, 1831.

not long be suspended.

It was, therefore, with greater confidence than ever in the ultimate outcome of the nullification controversy that he addressed a public dinner given for him and Harper at Clark's Hotel in Columbia soon after adjournment of the Philadelphia meeting. Both men, delegates to the Convention from Columbia, addressed the State Rights assemblage, described by the Telescope as "the largest that we have ever seen brought together here, upon a like occasion."<sup>99</sup> Harper spoke first. His rhetorical objective was to show what the effects of the Philadelphia meeting "have been and are like [IY] to be." Harper contended that (1) it had enabled the State Rights party "to feel where and to what extent" it might look "for aid and comfort"; (2) it had "brought into inevitable acknowledgement" the "moderation" of the South Carolina State Rights party; (3) it had shown that the other Southern states were depending upon South Carolina to take the lead in "bringing to the rescue of the constitution its last safety--State interposition"; (4) it had convinced the South Carolina delegation that "the State can and must act if this final attempt at conciliation fail."<sup>100</sup> After Harper spoke Preston was "called on" to address the zealous audience. He began by offering his own corroborating "testimony to facts that his precursor had given." His dominant purpose, however, was to extend Harper's remarks to "some further points,

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<sup>99</sup>Columbia Telescope, quoted in Charleston Mercury, November 5, 1831.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

exceedingly necessary to be considered." In sober vain, he stressed, first of all, the responsibility of the State Rights party to abide by the course of action adopted in Philadelphia. The South Carolina delegation had concurred in that course of action. Thus, it was bound to "abide the effect of the measures." But he hastened to add a warning. No one, he declared, should be so sanguine as to pin "more than the faintest hope" on the success of those measures. South Carolina, urged Preston, "must look finally to itself alone--must place its expectations on the sure basis of its own energy and resources."<sup>101</sup>

After stressing this view, Preston considered next the possible seducements against which "the South must guard itself with the intensest caution." In the first place, he contended that the manufacturing interests were likely "to hold out to us some deceitful compromise, that may make the oppression [of the tariff] permanent, by conciliating new interests to its support." Second, he thought it not unlikely that "the contending parties for the Presidency" might endeavor to win the South "with their usual coin of false promises."<sup>102</sup>

According to the Telescope's account, "After enforcing in the strongest manner this warm appeal to the prudence and spirit of the State, . . . [Preston] went on to enlarge upon the comparative course of the two parties, that now divide the South." Warning to his subject, he insisted that "the present contest was but the renewal of the ancient conflict between the lovers of despotism and the friends of

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

liberty." The "friends of liberty," or the State Rights group, "in this contest, as in all others, have been the truly moderate party."

His generalization was:

they alone are guilty of violence, in such struggles, who, by their inflexible and furious support of tyranny, and by their denunciations against the friends of true order and justice, make it so difficult to avoid the very violence which they promote, and of which, but for such as they, there could be no apprehension.<sup>103</sup>

Striking hard at the Unionists, Preston next gave vent to the rancor he felt for the party that had for three years inhibited application of the "South Carolina doctrine." The principles of the "Submission party," he declared, "were inborn, in some men, and would always make them the supporters of Government, no matter how violent or unjust." His lips trembling, the red-haired Richland orator now raised the pitch of his voice as he taunted the opposition:

But where, in the name of Heaven, . . . could that party now turn for pretexts? What new excuse could it find, after this last hope fails of justice from abroad, by which to defend the loyalty of its opposition to a State action against this oppression? After such long endurance, such remonstrance, such protests, when we have by this last measure, exhausted all possible forms of opposition to the tyranny but one--will they at last avow that they will oppose the Tariff no longer, rather than resort to the reserved powers of the State for relief? What new name will they now assume? What new principle, hitherto concealed, will they now avow?<sup>104</sup>

Preston spoke longer but his concluding remarks were not reported. The Telescope reporter summarized: "But we should attempt in vain to follow the vehement and highly argumentative course of the

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.



gentleman's speech; and it is scarcely easier to give an idea of the passionate applause with which every part of it was received."<sup>105</sup> Preston's and Harper's utterances received wide publicity, especially since the Telescope's resume of their speeches was published not only by the Richmond Enquirer, but also by the Washington National Intelligencer.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, their remarks were doubtless interpreted as being more or less the official position of the South Carolina State Rights party.

There was now little else that the advocates of a state convention could do but await the outcome of Congressional deliberations on the tariff. But if they read the signs aright they were fast approaching their finest hour. Most significant of the numerous factors auguring for their ultimate victory was Calhoun's active support. Thus far Calhoun had held the Nullifiers in check. Fearful of jeopardizing his chances for the Presidency, he had followed a conservative line. But the fiery leaders of the State Rights party were impatient of his middle-of-the-road course. And it was one of their number who forced his hand. On May 19, McDuffie addressed a public dinner given in his honor in Charleston. He harangued the audience for three hours, delivering "a superb and gigantic effort . . . which struck damp in the hearts' of his opponents."<sup>107</sup> McDuffie pleaded

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Richmond Enquirer, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, November 11, 1831.

<sup>107</sup>Quoted in Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, II, 110.

ferverently with his audience to nullify the tariff. Whether the means were "peaceable and constitutional," he seemed to care little. Wiltse believes that the primary effect of McDuffie's effort was "to blast Calhoun out of the middle of the road."<sup>108</sup>

The immediate upshot was Calhoun's composition in July of his famed Fort Hill address in which he repeated and enlarged upon the arguments of the Exposition, illustrating concretely the doctrine of state interposition. The document received national publicity and generated floods of newspaper commentary.<sup>109</sup> The Nullifiers could rejoice accordingly, for the identity of the "priest of the Nullifiers" was at last revealed to the eyes of the nation.

But for the moment, they could do little except await the action of Congress. They were committed to the Philadelphia measures. Besides, until a new legislature was elected they could not control the two-thirds majority required for calling a convention. Governor Hamilton spoke the attitude of the more thoughtful Nullifiers when he delivered his annual message to the legislature.

We must not put at hazard a good cause, by premature action. We have the moral force of a potent public opinion, operating in our behalf. . . . In fact, we occupy a position in which, without compromising our honor, we can pause, survey the whole ground before us, and collect our moral forces for the struggle which will come on, if we do not obtain our rights under the Constitution. . . .<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 112-116.

<sup>110</sup>Quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, December 13, 1831.

The Nullifiers did pause, but they were not silent. They could at least vent their wrath against President Andrew Jackson, with whom they had a score to settle. Jackson's real attitude toward the activities of the Nullifiers had not been clear until July 4, when the Arrangements Committee of a Union Party Fourth of July celebration received from him a reply to an invitation to be present. It stated in part, "Every enlightened citizen . . . should . . . see that high and sacred duties, which must and will at all hazards be performed, present an insurmountable barrier to the success of any plan of disorganization, by whatever patriotic name it may be decorated. . . ."<sup>111</sup>

The State Rights legislators were not disposed to be "schooled" by the Chief Executive. One of their first opportunities to strike at Jackson came on the evening of November 29, 1831, at a meeting in the Senate chamber "of the members of the legislature friendly to the re-election of General Jackson."<sup>112</sup> Although it was a Unionist move, most of the State Rights members attended. James L. Petigru precipitated a heated debate by the introduction of "a string of resolutions approving the administration of Gen. Jackson, and nominating him for re-election." The Southern Times reported that "a warm and general discussion ensued, in which Judge Smith, Messrs. Harrison, Spear, Levy, and T. Williams took part on one side, and Messrs. Deas, Preston, Butler, Dunkin and Werdlaw, on the other." The leading argument of the State Rights speakers was that the resolutions were premature inasmuch as South Carolina was involved in a struggle with the Federal

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<sup>111</sup>Quoted, ibid., December 24, 1831.

<sup>112</sup>Columbia Southern Times, quoted, ibid., December 7, 1831.

Government.<sup>113</sup> The meeting at length adjourned, and the opposing groups reconvened in separate halls. The question of Jackson's re-nomination was put in the Senate chamber and carried. When the opposition assembled in the hall of the House, Preston jumped to his feet and introduced the following resolution, which was "carried nem. con.":

Resolved, That the State of South Carolina, being engaged in a contest for great Constitutional rights and interests of paramount importance, it is inexpedient at this time to involve her in the struggles of the Presidential election, or to pledge her to any particular candidate.<sup>114</sup>

But Preston was hardly satisfied with this mild rebuke of Jackson. Nor was he long in formulating a stinging denunciation in the form of a report from the Federal Relations Committee to which had been referred "that part of the Governor's Message relating to the letter of General Jackson to the Union party. . . ."<sup>115</sup> Preston's report, termed by the Mercury, as "able and spirited," bore clearly the impress of his own rhetorical idiom. It crackled with pungent rhetorical questions: "Is the Legislature to be schooled and rated by the President of the United States? Is it to legislate under the sword of the Commander in Chief?" The letter of the President, the report continued, was "a manifest and most unauthorized interference of the Executive of the Union with the domestic parties of a separate State." The contending parties of South Carolina "might have been

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<sup>113</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 3, 9, 1831.

<sup>114</sup>Columbia Southern Times, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, December 7, 1831.

<sup>115</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 12, 1831.

permitted to settle their own disputes without the intermeddling of the President in a case out of his constitutional cognizance and not connected with any of his delegated powers." Continuing, Preston exclaimed sarcastically:

The Executive of a most limited government, the agent of an agency, but a part of the creature of the States, undertakes to prescribe the line of conduct to a free and sovereign State under denunciation of pains and penalties!<sup>116</sup>

Preston's scorching report was accompanied by resolutions censuring Jackson's conduct, and asserting the sovereignty of South Carolina.<sup>117</sup> A minority report from the Federal Relations Committee was submitted by D. E. Huger.<sup>118</sup> The two reports became the order of the day and precipitated a heated debate. But Jackson's annual message, conciliatory in tone, was received in time to gain for him "a commendatory resolution along with the condemnation." An attempt by the Unionists to achieve an endorsement of the President's entire course proved abortive.<sup>119</sup> Victory, slender though it was, belonged to "the

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<sup>116</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, December 20, 1831; Niles' Weekly Register, XLI (January 7, 1832), 352.

<sup>117</sup>Preston's resolutions were surprisingly mild in tone by contrast with the language of the report: "1. Resolved, That the letter of the President of the United States to a portion of the citizens of Charleston, bearing date 14th of June, 1831, is at once at variance with his duties and the rights of the States. 2. Resolved, That whether the threat contained in that letter was aimed at the freedom of discussion, or at the sovereign authority of South Carolina it is equally entitled to the decided reprehension of this Legislature and is incapable of exciting any other than an augmented resolution to maintain inviolate the federal principles of the compact." Journals of the House, 1831, 56.

<sup>118</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 12, 1831.

<sup>119</sup>Boucher, The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 160-161; Charleston Mercury, December 17, 1831.



Hotspurs of South Carolina." The Telescope crowed, "The tone of the President is certainly wonderfully lowered. . . . If this iron head has felt, at last, some impression, it is only from the iron hand of South Carolina courage and good principle."<sup>120</sup>

As Preston had predicted, the crisis came when Congress finished its work on July 17, 1832, without providing a significant reduction in the tariff. Even before the passage of the Tariff Act of July 14, 1832, sentiment in the state was at fever pitch. Robert Barnwell Rhett's speech at Walterboro on July 4, which amounted to "a manifesto and a call to arms," was most favorably received.<sup>121</sup> Few could doubt, as the canvass for the legislature progressed through July and August, that the state would soon attempt to redress its wrongs. One newspaper declared in August, "We have arrived, in South Carolina, to that state of feeling when enthusiasm has given place to cool determination. . . ."<sup>122</sup> The Nullifiers captured control of the legislature in the October elections, and Governor Hamilton called an extraordinary session for October 22.<sup>123</sup>

Preston, who for four years had been one of the state's leading spokesmen for a convention, was elected with ease, and answered the roll on the opening day of the extra session. Hamilton's message, which sanctioned a "tribunal" of the people of the state, was referred

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<sup>120</sup>Columbia Telescope, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, December 21, 1831.

<sup>121</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, II, 143.

<sup>122</sup>Winyaw Intelligencer, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, August 24, 1832.

<sup>123</sup>Houston, A Study of Nullification in South Carolina, 107.



to a joint committee of both houses on October 22.<sup>124</sup> The committee wasted no time in formulating a bill for a convention, and on October 26 the bill was enacted by a vote of 96 to 25 in the House, and by a vote of 31 to 13 in the Senate.<sup>125</sup> It provided that a convention be assembled in Columbia on November 19 to deliberate on the tariff question and "devise the means of redress."<sup>126</sup> After the seal was affixed to the act, the legislature adjourned to reconvene on the fourth Monday of November.

On November 19, the Nullification convention assembled in the hall of the House of Representatives with 156 members present. Preston, one of the five delegates from Richland District, was appointed to a Committee of Twenty-one, which was charged with the real work of the convention.<sup>127</sup> The committee promptly drew up an Ordinance of Nullification declaring all acts of Congress imposing duties on foreign commodities "null, void, and no law, not binding upon this state, its officers or citizens. . . ."<sup>128</sup> The Ordinance, which was to become effective on February 1, 1833, received an overwhelming vote of 136 to

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<sup>124</sup>The Committee consisted of Seabrook, Warren, Butler, Campbell, Reid, and Patterson from the Senate, and Preston, Noble, R. A. Smith, Player, Holmes, Dunkin, McCord, McWillie, Cohen, Potts, and Maxwell from the House. "Editor's Correspondence," Washington National Intelligencer, October 30, 1832.

<sup>125</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, XLIII (November 10, 1832), 173.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid. (November 3, 1832), 152.

<sup>127</sup>Houston, A Critical Study of Nullification in South Carolina, 110.

<sup>128</sup>Journal of the Convention of 1832 (Columbia, S. C., 1860), 8.

26 on November 24, the final day of the proceedings.<sup>129</sup>

Interposition had been effected, and Preston now saw his prediction become historical reality. But his labors in behalf of the cause for which he had struggled for four years were hardly finished. When the legislature reassembled on November 27, Preston's Federal Relations Committee set to work devising a bill to "carry into effect, in part, the Ordinance of Nullification." On December 4, Preston reported an elaborate bill, "to give full effect to the Ordinance, and to prevent the enforcement of . . . [The tariff] acts . . . of the Congress of the United States within the limits of this State. . . ."<sup>130</sup>

There was little in these proceedings to stir debate, and the Nullifiers pushed through their measures with ease. Yet a stimulus for strong rhetoric was not long in coming--one which elicited from Preston the final significant effort of his four-year tenure in the legislature. It came in the form of a Proclamation by Jackson against the Nullifiers. Issued on December 10, the Proclamation was referred to Preston's Committee. In terse, direct language the document declared that no state could refuse to obey the law; that no state could leave the Union. Moreover, it advised the people of South Carolina that they had been led by "deluded or designing" leaders to the edge of treason, and it left no doubt that Jackson would use armed force to collect the duties in the rebellious state.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>130</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 10, 1832; Washington National Intelligencer, December 12, 15, 1832.

<sup>131</sup>Proclamation of General Andrew Jackson, President of the United States, Against Nullification (Washington, 1836), 1-15.

Jackson's Proclamation reached Columbia on December 17, and was laid before the Federal Relations Committee. After Preston had finished reading it, he "stepped into the Executive Chamber and inquired of the Governor [Hayne] whether he would undertake a prompt and official reply to the Proclamation." Hayne's reply, wrote Preston, was, "'I will undertake it if the Legislature so desire.'"<sup>132</sup>

Minutes after the House convened, Preston sprang to his feet, and moved "to suspend the orders of the day, in order to place before the House a most important and extraordinary document, just put in his hands by one of our Senators in Congress."<sup>133</sup> The House acceded, and Preston, hotly indignant, launched a furious assault on Jackson. In the words of one member of the House, the Richland orator "reached and for ten or fifteen minutes retained the highest strain of effective eloquence that I ever remember to have heard."<sup>134</sup>

For want of adequate reporting, the complete text of Preston's effort is not available. Resumes of the fiery speech were carried, however, in both the Telescope and the Mercury.<sup>135</sup> Preston launched his assault by charging that Jackson had

<sup>132</sup>Quoted in O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 20.

<sup>133</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 20, 1832.

<sup>134</sup>D. L. Wardlaw, quoted in Carlisle, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., 180.

<sup>135</sup>Columbia Telescope, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, December 27, 1832; Charleston Mercury, December 20, 1832. The two reports of Preston's speech are identical except for the final phrase, which, in the Telescope is "blacken our air," and in the Mercury, "blacken on our air."

assumed singly to decide the entire controversy--to take judicial and legislative, as well as executive cognizance of the matter, and to cut the Gordian knot of these Constitutional difficulties with the sword.

He went on to remind his listeners that the Chief Executive had thus taken to himself a power which the Nullifiers denied even to "the whole of the Government."

Jackson's principles, insisted Preston, were "new and startling." But not less so was his "mode of announcing them." Continuing his philippic, Preston appealed in feverish phrase to the high pride of his listeners:

Who, and where, are we? Are we Russian serfs; or slaves of a Divan? Are we on the banks of the Bosphorus, or the Neva? Or is it on our own free streams that these things are proclaimed? Was our high and well considered appeal to Congress and the States in this manner to be met by the blind fury and indecency of a man, who thus vents upon the liberties of the country, his own personal animosities?<sup>136</sup>

In full recognition of the mood of his audience, Preston next defined his rhetorical purpose and appealed for action. "We should," he cried acidly, "hurl back instant scorn and defiance, for this important missile of despicable malignity." The "paltry sophisms" and "disgraceful invectives" of the document were, however, "unworthy of answer." But a counter proclamation, Preston urged, must be made in order that "the country and the world should know, how perfectly we despise and defy him. . . ." Moreover, the country and world

should be told that, before they plant such principles as his upon our free soil, the bones of many an enemy shall whiten our shores--the carcasses of many a caittiff and traitor, blacken our air.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup>Ibid.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

Preston's rousing extempore effort was adjudged effective. Forcher, at this time a member of the House, wrote in his Memoirs that Preston "spoke in a masterly strain of indignant eloquence, such as I have never heard before or since."<sup>138</sup>

Before leaving the floor Preston introduced a resolution requesting the legislature to authorize Governor Hayne to issue a counter proclamation. After Rhett, Francis Pickens, and Isaac Holmes had heaped further malediction upon Jackson, Rhett called for the ayes and noes. Preston's resolution was carried by a vote of 90 to 24,<sup>139</sup> and the Senate concurred in the House action.

For several days the irate Preston focused his energies on the Jackson document. On December 19, he reported a series of denunciatory resolutions from the Federal Relations Committee. In essence, Preston's report declared (1) that the Constitution did not authorize the President to interfere in the affairs of a state by means of a proclamation, or to use a proclamation as an instrument for "promulgating executive expositions of the Constitution"; (2) that the President was not authorized by the Constitution to order by proclamation the constituted authorities of a state to repeal their legislation; (3) that the opinions of the President regarding the rights of the states would lead "to the establishment of a consolidated Government. . . ."; (4) that each state had a right to decide "to secede peaceably" from

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<sup>138</sup>Stoney (ed.), "Memoirs of Frederick Adolphus Forcher," loc. cit., 146.

<sup>139</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 20, 1832. According to the Telescope, "every Union man voted against the resolution." Columbia Telescope, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, December 27, 1832.



the Union; (5) that the primary allegiance of the citizens of South Carolina was to their state; (6) that the President's declaration of his "personal feelings and relations towards the State of South Carolina," is a "blending of official and individual character, heretofore unknown in our State papers, and revolting to our conceptions of political propriety"; and (7) that the State of South Carolina would "repel force by force."<sup>140</sup>

Preston's blistering report was taken up, seriatim on December 20, and adopted "by the usual vote." The House also ordered that copies of it "be sent to our members in Congress, to be laid before that body."<sup>141</sup> Meanwhile, Governor Hayne had composed his counter proclamation to Jackson, which was also reported in the House on December 20. Hayne's document was a refutation of Jackson's reasoning with regard to the rights of the states, and an appeal to the citizens of South Carolina to "be faithful" to the state and to disregard Jackson's "vain menaces."<sup>142</sup> After the reading of it, Preston proposed an additional resolution, which embodied, in Jervey's opinion, "the strongest point" of Hayne's document.<sup>143</sup> It read as follows:

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<sup>140</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, XLIII (January 5, 1833), 300; Washington National Intelligencer, December 29, 1832.

<sup>141</sup>Columbia Southern Patriot, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, December 31, 1832.

<sup>142</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, XLIII (January 5, 1833), 308-312. Preston affirmed that Hayne's counter proclamation was "perfect for the occasion." Quoted in O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 20.

<sup>143</sup>Theodore D. Jervey, Robert Y. Hayne and His Times (New York, 1909), 341.



Resolved, That the proclamation of the President is the more extraordinary, that he has silently, and, as it is supposed, with entire approbation, witnessed our sister State of Georgia, avow, act upon, and carry into effect even to the taking of life, principles identical with those now denounced by him in South Carolina.<sup>144</sup>

Obviously Preston's aim was to reveal Jackson's gross inconsistency, but, as Jervey observes, it was couched in phraseology which made it "more of an appeal than a defiance."<sup>145</sup> Certainly, the tone was almost plaintive by contrast with the bristling set of resolutions issued from Preston's Committee. Nonetheless, the additional resolution was carried.<sup>146</sup> After a night-long session, the legislature adjourned on December 21, and Preston's career in the South Carolina lower House came to an end.

On the day following the adjournment of the legislature, however, Preston found another opportunity to flay Jackson. The occasion was "a meeting of the citizens of Richland," held in Columbia. Although Preston evidently discussed various facets of the South Carolina crisis, his main object appears to have been to unmask Jackson before his fellow citizens. Available only is an "extract" of the address, which, in essence, is a denunciation of Jackson.

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<sup>144</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 24, 1832. The reference is to a Supreme Court case involving a dispute between the state of Georgia and the Cherokee Nation, in which the Court ruled that certain Georgia laws "were of no force." The Administration made no attempt to carry out the judgment of the Court "that happened to conflict with the sovereignty of a state." See Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, II, 145-147.

<sup>145</sup>Jervey, Robert Y. Hayne and His Times, 341.

<sup>146</sup>Columbia Southern Patriot, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, December 31, 1832.

Significantly, Preston's philippic on the hustings was even more caustically phrased than that delivered some days before in the lower House.

His first remarks were directed at the significance of Jackson's Proclamation. "It was an act," he avowed, "more prolific of mischief, more threatening, more portentous of the utter and sudden overthrow of all freedom, than this country, in the natural decay and corruption of its institutions, could well have expected, for centuries to come." The "votaries of liberty" everywhere would "pronounce curses upon it"; "all tongues and times" would "join in the execration." Continuing, Preston affirmed:

It was such an act as would have cost an English Premier his head--such an act as, in an European kingdom, lately drove the arbitrary heir of the Bourbons from his throne, a beggarly exile in a foreign land.<sup>147</sup>

Preston turned next to a consideration of Jackson's motives. In one of the most vitriolic moments of his oratorical career, he impugned Jackson's character:

The blow thus aimed at all freedom was not the less detestable because (ignorant and wretched old man that he is!) he strikes, or thinks he strikes a blow at a rival and an enemy--at John C. Calhoun, rather than at the land of his own birth. Narrow-minded--vindictive--savage--corrupt--what cares he how deep the wounds he inflicts upon the Constitution, if he can only pierce through the man he hates.<sup>148</sup>

Continuing his withering assault, Preston shifted from blunt invective to biting sarcasm.

<sup>147</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, January 17, 1833.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

And yet this very parricide, at the moment even when he is arming himself against his native State, he claims, with a rare audacity, a sort of paternity over our people! He the father of our citizens! A gentle and kindly parent he is like to be! Such a father of our citizens, as he is son of the State!--equally loving, tender, and true!<sup>149</sup>

Preston concluded his acrimonious address in a melodramatic vein. To Jackson's "utter betrayal," he declared, "the causes of all uncorrupt hearts must be given. Their voice, even now, begins to sound from all the four quarters of the Heavens, in one universal cry of horror and indignation."<sup>150</sup> This effort was to be, as events proved, the mere prelude of a prolonged and bitter rhetorical battle which the mercurial Preston waged against "King Andrew" until the latter went into retirement in 1837.

That the Nullifiers had not been completely victorious in their struggle was, after all, due in large measure to Jackson's inhibitory action. The Nullifiers had not expected him to take such a determined stand. Neither had they expected to find themselves without the support of other states. Accordingly, before February 1--the date appointed for the Ordinance to go into effect--the State Rights leaders met in Charleston and quietly rescinded their Ordinance.<sup>151</sup> Congress, as well as the President, were disposed, however, "to appease South Carolina," and on February 26, 1833, Congress approved a Compromise Tariff Bill, which provided for a gradual reduction of the tariff

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<sup>149</sup>Ibid.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid.

<sup>151</sup>Houston, A Study of Nullification in South Carolina, 121-124.

until July 1, 1842, after which date "duties would stand at the uniform rate of 20 per cent."<sup>152</sup> On the other hand, both Jackson and the Congress wished to assert the "supremacy of the Union." The result was the Force Act, providing for the forcible collection of duties in the state,<sup>153</sup> which was passed by Congress on March 1. Once more the South Carolina Convention assembled in Columbia. When it adjourned on March 18, it had solemnly rescinded by a vote of 153 to 4 the Ordinance of Nullification, declared the Force Act "null and void," and adopted a report approving Clay's Compromise Tariff Act.<sup>154</sup> With these actions the struggle between the Nullifiers and the Federal Government was virtually concluded.

Preston and his fellow advocates of nullification could not claim complete victory. Houston has pointed out that insofar as principles are concerned, "the issue of the controversy was decidedly a victory for the general government."<sup>155</sup> Yet there is little doubt that the action of the Nullifiers hastened considerably the tariff reduction which Congress approved in 1833. On the other hand, the controversy served to create "a new sectional solidarity." As Wiltse observes, "The wind of suspicion had been sown, and the whirlwind of civil war would inescapably be the harvest."<sup>156</sup>

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 125-126.

<sup>153</sup>Boucher, The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 276.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., 289-290.

<sup>155</sup>Houston, A Study of Nullification in South Carolina, 134.

<sup>156</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, II, 198.

In last analysis, Preston's role in the struggle, heretofore unassessed, was a highly significant one. He was one of the most ardent and persevering--as well as one of the ablest--advocates of state interposition. Not so conservative as his mentor, Calhoun, nor so radical as Rhett, his mission was to keep alive through public address, both in the forum and on the hustings, the thesis that South Carolina's only hope of achieving relief from the protective principle was by the mode of nullification. In support of this message he argued persuasively, applying effective motivation to his argument, couching the matter of his speech in lucid and pungent phraseology, and reinforcing it with effective delivery.

The cultivated Preston received for his zeal and abilities from the victorious faction a most handsome endorsement when the legislature convened in November, 1833. In mid-November Stephen D. Miller resigned his seat in the Senate because of ill health, and Preston was selected by the legislature to take his place. According to the Mercury, Preston's succession was without opposition, but the Courier reported a vote of 101 to 25.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 2, 1833; Charleston Courier, December 3, 1833; Washington National Intelligencer, November 26, December 6, 1833.

## CHAPTER VII

### COALITION ORATOR UNDER JACKSON

After an absence of twenty years, Preston returned to the nation's capital in December, 1833, to enter upon the duties of his new office. Making the long journey to Washington with him were his second wife and his only child, Sally Preston, now seven years of age. Two years after the death of his first wife,<sup>1</sup> he had married an "amiable, beautiful, well-informed, and accomplished lady," Miss Penelope Davis, the second daughter of Dr. James Davis of Columbia. On a raw day in early December, Preston and his family arrived in Washington, where he found living accommodations in the spacious home of his old friend and kinsman, the matronly Dolly Madison.<sup>2</sup>

Fresh from oratorical victories in the nullification contest, Preston took his seat beside Calhoun in the Senate chamber on December 9, 1833. A finished rhetorician, imaginative, cultivated, and well-informed, he was ideally suited to the responsibilities and challenges of the higher forum. Nor could he have made his debut as a member of the upper house in a session of more distinguished character.

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<sup>1</sup>Columbia Telescope, April 3, 1829; Preston to Waddy Thompson, Columbia, January 23, 1829, Waddy Thompson Papers, South Caroliniana Library.

<sup>2</sup>O'Neall, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 534; Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 141.



Occupying seats in the small, semi-circular chamber of the Senate, were Clay of Kentucky, Webster of Massachusetts, and Calhoun of South Carolina. In addition to these oratorical giants, many others, "little inferior to them," held seats in the Senate chamber. Among them were John M. Clayton of Delaware, Samuel Southard and Theodore Frelinghuysen of New Jersey, Silas Wright of New York, William C. Rives of Virginia, George Poindexter of Mississippi, George Bibb of Kentucky, Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, and John M. Berrien of Georgia. In his autobiography, William John Grayson characterized the famous session of 1833-1834, as "an august body, hardly equalled, certainly not surpassed, by any English House of Lords."<sup>3</sup>

Entering the Senate at the age of thirty-eight, in the full flower of his life, Preston made a most favorable impression on that body. During the first session of the Twenty-third Congress he assumed an unusually prominent role for a new member, taking his place side by side with the eminent leaders of the day.

The session of 1833-1834 was perhaps as stormy as any in the annals of the American Congress; as such, it was admirably suited to Preston's peculiarly pungent utterance. The coalition of National Republicans and Nullifiers, led by Henry Clay, pitted its combined forces against the Jackson Democrats, led by Thomas Hart Benton, in what Bowers has described as "the most bitter party battle ever waged."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Stoney (ed.), "The Autobiography of William John Grayson," loc. cit., 131.

<sup>4</sup>Claude G. Bowers, The Party Battles of the Jackson Period (Boston, 1922), 322.

During the "battle of the gods," which raged with fury for seven months, Preston locked arms with the "great triumvirate" to overcome the Jackson administration. The common theme of the Whig coalition throughout the session was, as Wiltse observes, "executive usurpation."<sup>5</sup> Preston, "the new Lion from South Carolina," made two notable speeches during the first session in support of the coalition theme.

The grand issue was made up before the first session of the Twenty-third Congress convened on December 2. During his first administration Jackson vetoed a bill for the re-charter of the Second Bank of the United States. Convinced that the institution was detrimental to the nation's interests, as well as "hostile to him personally," he was determined that it should not be re-chartered. Nor was he disposed to let the charter run its full course of three more years. In his annual message to Congress in December, 1832, he recommended that the stock held by the United States in the Bank be sold, and that the condition of the Bank be investigated, for the purpose of determining whether the public deposits in its keeping were safe. Although these recommendations failed to receive Congressional endorsement, "King Andrew" was not diverted from his objective. He was convinced that the Bank was insolvent, and that it was engaged in "buying up" members of Congress.<sup>6</sup> He was aware that this citadel of finance, under the management of the redoubtable Nicolas Biddle, had "actively worked against him in the fall election."<sup>7</sup> Impelled by these convictions,

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<sup>5</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 225.

<sup>6</sup>Cong. Globe, 23rd Cong., 1st Sess., 6-7.

<sup>7</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 205.

Jackson shuffled his cabinet in preparation for a decisive and unprecedented move against the Bank.

His plan was to remove the federal funds from the Bank and to order that no more such funds be deposited in it. Instead of using Biddle's Bank as the depository of federal funds, the government would use selected state banks. William J. Duane, Secretary of the Treasury, was promptly dismissed when it was learned that he would not comply with Jackson's proposed plan. In Roger B. Taney, who was immediately appointed to the Treasury post, the President found a willing lieutenant.<sup>8</sup>

Acting on executive order, Taney directed, on September 26, 1833, that the "government funds should thereafter be deposited in certain state banks." Taney directed that, after October 1, disbursements would continue to be made from the Bank of the United States until its deposits of government funds were exhausted. Biddle struck back immediately, adopting a "course designed to compel the restoration of deposits" and the renewal of the Bank charter. The Bank lent generously to Congressmen and to newspapers, and initiated a sudden contraction of credit.<sup>9</sup>

In the Senate the opposition quickly closed ranks under the leadership of Clay, and was able to control the Senate organization. All of the committees contained opposition majorities.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 206-208.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.; Frederick Jackson Turner, The United States, 1830-1850 (New York, 1935), 423-425.

<sup>10</sup>Preston was elected a member of two standing committees--the Committee on Military Affairs and the Committee on the Judiciary.

coalition was "brilliantly augmented" by the appearance of Preston, as well as Benjamin W. Leigh of Virginia, each of whom filled vacancies.<sup>11</sup> The Jackson forces, though in a minority, also claimed their share of able and loyal partisans.

The opposition consumed some time in mapping its strategy. From Justice Story, Webster secured the legal opinion required by Clay's forces, "that the Secretary of the Treasury did not become custodian of the funds by virtue of his position in the Cabinet, but held them as 'a personal trust, and as much so as if confided to the Chief Justice of the United States.'"<sup>12</sup> The friends of the Bank were now prepared to act.

Clay formulated a set of resolutions, which he submitted on December 26, censuring Jackson. The resolutions affirmed that by his recent action, Jackson had "assumed the exercise of a power over the Treasury not granted to him by the Constitution and the laws." They further declared that the reasons given by Taney for the removal of the federal funds were "unsatisfactory and insufficient."<sup>13</sup>

The issue was drawn. The colorful Kentuckian led his opposition orators to the assault in a three-day speech on the censure resolution. "Never up to that time," says Bowers, "nor again for more than a generation, did Congress so completely hold the interest of the country. The great orators of the Opposition never shone with greater lustre."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Bowers, Party Battles of the Jackson Period, 319.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted, ibid., 235.

<sup>13</sup>Cong. Globe, 23rd Cong., 1st Sess., 54.

<sup>14</sup>Bowers, Party Battles of the Jackson Period, 326.

Impassioned rhetoric was the order of the day, and the recurrent theme of the opposition addresses was executive despotism and the "loss of liberty." Daily the small Senate chamber and its galleries were packed with Washingtonians. When the House adjourned, many of its members rushed to the Senate to catch some glimpses of the greatest performers. The galleries became the "peacock alley of fashion" where Washington respectability congregated in stiff collars and bustling skirts.<sup>15</sup>

Scarcely had Clay opened the coalition assault when memorials and petitions began to flood the Senate. These "distress petitions" were recitals of economic disasters, praying for the restoration of the federal deposits. Wiltse has pointed out that "in most cases" the distress depicted by the memorialists was "real, though probably exaggerated." After losing the federal funds, Biddle could do little else but tighten credit "preparatory to balancing his books."<sup>16</sup>

Clay's opening speech was a thunderous philippic against Jackson's Bank policy. The core idea of his three-day effort was that the federal powers were being concentrated in one man. He could see "an elective monarchy" in the making. The "Goths" had taken over the Capitol and must be driven out. Thus, Clay established the temper of the long debates.<sup>17</sup>

When the debate was three weeks old, Preston delivered his maiden speech. Sitting beside Calhoun, directly in front of the

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 215.

<sup>17</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, December 27, 1833.

Chair, his pen always in his hand, he had followed the debate with keen interest. When the special order of the day was announced on January 23, he was on his feet immediately. Beginning at one o'clock, Preston spoke until the Senate adjourned at three o'clock.<sup>18</sup>

According to the Mercury, "The expectations which had been awakened by Mr. Preston's reputation as a speaker, filled the Senate Chamber, lobby and galleries to overflowing long before the usual hour for taking up the orders of the day."<sup>19</sup>

Preston presented a striking physical appearance to his expectant audience as he moved with "Roman ease" to his position directly in front of the Chair. Tall, "athletic, and sandy complexioned," he stood proudly erect, his figure draped in a "splendid cloak" which he managed with the grace of a Roman tribune. After pivoting slightly to address the Chair, Preston turned his large blue eyes upon the rows of faces before him. He began at a characteristically deliberate rate and in "a subdued tone," articulating crisply and pronouncing correctly. Adding to the effectiveness of his opening utterance was also his "sonorous" voice quality, so often noted by his contemporaries.

Preston strove in his two-hour speech to establish the thesis that the "true cause" of the "dread and dismay" of the nation lay not in the Bank's contraction of credit but in the President's blow,

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<sup>18</sup>Charleston Mercury, February 1, 1834.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.



"struck at high and sacred chartered rights."<sup>20</sup> In his opening remarks, Preston commented on the character and function of the Bank. It was, he urged, the "great incorporated credit of the United States, the great censorium of the United States." A blow struck at it must cause a "derangement of public affairs." Such a blow must also cause the Bank "to contract its muscles."

In refutatory spirit, he next turned to the proof of his proposition. "If anything," he declared, "it was the reverence for chartered rights, such as shook the Whigs of England, which produced this state of things. . . . I hope to show that, from the inception of this object, it was a violation of high chartered rights." In a closely-knit and carefully-supported argument, Preston sought first to establish the contention that Jackson's removal of the deposits was, in fact, a violation of chartered rights. The mode of investigation of the Bank was a palpable violation of the charter. The charter itself, affirmed Preston, prescribed "other modes" of investigation than that which had been used by Jackson. The Government Directors, sitting on the board of twenty-five, were only Bank directors, and were agents of the government--not of the President. Moreover, Preston argued that the Bank charter was also violated by Jackson's exposing the private accounts of individuals to the "public gaze" in the prosecution of the investigation of the Bank. Turning next to his thesis, Preston asked: "When the charter should be thus violated under the sanction of the President, and by the officers of the Government,

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<sup>20</sup>Cong. Globe, 23rd Cong., 1st Sess., 123.

was it surprising that public feeling should revolt against the act?" But there was yet another circumstance adequate to produce the public "shock." In one of his early messages to Congress, Jackson had affirmed that "the only mode of investigation was by Congress, through the medium of a Committee." Such a committee had been appointed, and it had carried out its function. But the President was not satisfied; so, he had removed the deposits.

Increasing his speaking rate, Preston turned to his next sub-contention. Not only had the charter been violated, but also "all the rights of the Government had been violated." Echoing his philippic of 1832 against Jackson, Preston thundered, "The Executive has usurped both the judicial and legislative power, and is concentrating all the power of the Government in his own hands." Putting himself upon "general positions," he next turned to the testimony of his constituents to prove the Bank was solvent in the eyes of its stockholders. "Had a single cent been lost?" It was thus ironical that the President should erroneously assume "penal power" over the Bank in order to "punish" it for "delinquencies" not proved. The charter provided for a "trial by jury" in all cases regarding its chartered rights. Supplementing his words with dynamic bodily action, Preston asked his auditors:

Why, then, did the Executive shrink from the trial by jury, when, in but a little time, the truth might be winnowed from falsehood? Why not now issue a scire facias? Why concentrate all these sacred powers in the marble palace of the Executive?

Preston ended his two-hour maiden effort in prophetic vein, pronouncing, along the way, an encomium upon the habeas corpus act:

The courts and the laws are superseded, and next will be the jury, and next will be the habeas corpus act, that glorious palladium of both English and American freedom, which has recently been so signally exercised to the rescue of a free citizen from another executive assumption of power.<sup>21</sup>

By this effort Preston had fully vindicated his reputation as one of the nation's leading orators. The Mercury's Washington correspondent wrote: "There was something so powerful in his arguments, so fascinating in his tones and inflections, so graceful in his gesticulations and so thrilling in his exposure of the course of despotic power, now pursued by the Executive, that a burst of enthusiastic applause proceeded from the audience."<sup>22</sup> The same writer continued: "Mr. Preston's speech is pronounced by all to be the most eloquent that has yet been delivered on the subject in the Senate. Such was the effect on the minds of those who heard it, that a gentleman on leaving the Senate Chamber, expressed regret that he had not been a nullifier."<sup>23</sup>

Praise of Preston's effort piled up as the days passed, and became the burden of many conversations in Washington society. The aging John Quincy Adams, who managed to hear Preston for "only three or four minutes," recorded in his Diary under date of January 23 that Preston "has produced a strong sensation by this speech."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Charleston Mercury, February 1, 1834.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Allan Nevins (ed.), The Diary of John Quincy Adams (New York, 1928), 446.

Gales and Seaton, editors of the Washington National Intelligencer, fractured their rule "never again to commend a Speech," declaring that Preston "has fully sustained the reputation which he brought here, as being one of the most eloquent orators of his country."<sup>25</sup>

Three days later the Mercury's correspondent wrote:

In all companies, in all places, and with all parties, that I have conversed with . . . [Preston's speech] is spoken of in terms of unqualified praise and admiration. It is the only subject of conversation in the Halls of Legislation, in the Hotels, and in the Drawing Room. Did you hear Preston's speech? Is the first word said to you.<sup>26</sup>

The most compelling evidence of the favorable response to Preston's utterance resides not in the flood of plaudits, but in the apprehensiveness of Benton's orators. Upon Forsyth of Georgia devolved the uninviting chore of answering Preston. On January 27, Forsyth--called by the Mercury "the best speaker of the administration after Rives"--attempted in a lengthy discourse "to break the chain which he felt had been thrown over the hearts of the people, by the overpowering speech of Mr. Preston." In his lengthy exordium he spent some time in praise of Preston, whose "eloquent and exciting speech" still had the "public bosom" throbbing, and whose heart was animated by the blood of "the illustrious Henry." Coming to his arguments, Forsyth "sunk in spirit, point, and power," declared the Mercury. His attempt to refute Preston's proposition--a fresh consideration in the debate--was abortive, as an examination of his speech shows.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, January 24, 1834.

<sup>26</sup>Charleston Mercury, February 3, 1834.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., February 4, 1834.

Not until almost a month later did Preston again enter the discussion of the Bank question. The occasion was a "protracted debate" on February 14, growing out of a memorial and resolutions submitted by Mangum "from a meeting of citizens in North Carolina, in relation to the removal of the deposits."<sup>28</sup> Forsyth, Webster, Clay, Brown, Wright, and Wilkins also participated in the debate. According to the Mercury, the burden of Preston's "extemporaneous effort" was to depict "the condition to which our social and political system would be reduced by the experiments they [the people] are undergoing under Jackson." Preston's speech, declared the Mercury, "has raised him even beyond his previous elevation. . . . He has far transcended the fame which preceded him."<sup>29</sup> A correspondent of the Portland, Maine, Advertiser, hearing Preston for the first time on this occasion, noted that "The men in the galleries were quivering with suppressed approbation. . . . Never was there a man more calculated to bewitch the people than this Preston."<sup>30</sup>

Preston was now, after only two senatorial speeches, one of the most discussed and admired congressmen in Washington. A Pennsylvanian, visiting in Washington in mid-February, wrote to his wife, "Mr. Preston of S. Carolina is by all accounts the most eloquent man in either House."<sup>31</sup> In the battle with the popular Jackson, Clay's

<sup>28</sup>Cong. Globe, 23rd Cong., 1st Sess., 169, 175.

<sup>29</sup>Charleston Mercury, February 22, 1834.

<sup>30</sup>Portland Advertiser, quoted, ibid., March 7, 1834.

<sup>31</sup>Thomas Williams to his wife, Washington, D. C., February 23, 1834, in Alva B. Konkle, The Life and Speeches of Thomas Williams, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1905), I, 56.

forces had thus been brilliantly augmented by Preston who, perhaps as much as any other orator, delighted in the furious assault on "King Andrew."

The coalition orators won the first round in their battle with Jackson. On March 28, Clay's censure resolution passed by a vote of 26 to 20.<sup>32</sup> Thus ended a debate which "had covered," in the words of Clay, "the longest period which had been occupied in a single debate in either House of Congress since the organization of the Government."<sup>33</sup>

The verbal battle entered a new phase when, three weeks after the adoption of Clay's censure resolutions, Jackson's famous "Protest" was read to the Senate. The document, which Jackson insisted be entered in the Senate proceedings, declared that the censure passed upon him was "extra-judicial and unparliamentary." Maintaining that the censure was "really an impeachment," Jackson held that it was invalid chiefly for the reason that it originated not in the House, but in the Senate.<sup>34</sup> The "Protest," read to the Senate on April 17, 1834, triggered a blazing one-month debate, in which Preston again entered the lists against Old Hickory.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Cong. Globe, 23rd Cong., 1st Sess., 271. Benton maintained that the resolutions of censure passed by the same majority that would have voted for it on the first day of its introduction. Thomas Hart Benton, Thirty Years in the U. S. Senate, 2 vols. (New York, 1854), I, 423.

<sup>33</sup>Clay's "Speech on the Removal of the Deposits," Cong. Globe, 23rd Cong., 1st Sess., 269.

<sup>34</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, XLVI (April 26, 1834), 138-144.

<sup>35</sup>Cong. Globe, 23rd Cong., 1st Sess., 331.



Debate followed immediately the reading of Jackson's "Protest." Poindexter of Mississippi moved that the "Protest be not received," and he was supported by Sprague of Maine and Frelinghuysen of New Jersey.<sup>36</sup> Benton flew to Jackson's defense, giving notice "of his intention to move . . . an expunging resolution against the sentence of the Senate. . . ." <sup>37</sup> On April 21, "a debate of some length" ensued, in which Preston participated, along with Forsyth, Ewing, Poindexter, Clayton, Webster, and Clay. Preston's remarks, fully reported in the Mercury, were largely refutatory in character. His object was to demolish the leading arguments advanced by Forsyth, who preceded him in the debate. His weapons were chiefly reductio ad absurdum and blighting sarcasm.

Preferring the rapier to the bludgeon, Preston opened his remarks with a sharp thrust at the motives of the pro-Jackson orators. Was their extreme "sensitiveness" to any motion touching "executive power" connected in any way with "what may be their privileges and powers on some future occasion?" In closing his exordium he declared, "I remark it as a curiosity of the times, that this sensitiveness exists whenever Executive power is touched, but that there is nothing of squeamishness exhibited when the rights of the Senate are assailed."

Preston turned next to Forsyth's arguments. The Georgia senator had urged that Clay's resolution of censure was an assault on the President of the United States, and had "rebuked" Preston's

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 359.

<sup>37</sup>Benton, Thirty Years' View, I, 425-426.

"colleague" for saying that the President has made "an assault on the Senate." Preston began his attack by declaring, "Now, surely, the Senate stands in the same relation to the President as the President stands in to the Senate." He then went on to demonstrate the essential difference in the character of the legislative and the executive actions. The Senate had not gone "out of their own Department." They had passed their own resolutions, and entered them on their own Journal, which was in the hands of their own executive officer. Jackson was not content, however, to enter his "Protest" on his "Executive Journal." Bent on offensive warfare, declared Preston, Jackson wished his "attack on the Senate in its individual and corporate character and capacity" to be entered on the Senate Journal. Turning the tables on Forsyth, Preston clinched his refutation by asking:

Suppose the Senate should go beyond their own Journal and ask the President to enter on the Executive Journal the resolutions disapproving of his conduct--would it be right? Should we not deserve to have our request thrown back upon us with scorn? Certainly we should. Each Department ought to be kept separate. The President may act as he pleases at the White House. We will act as we please here.

Preston's language became severe as he answered Forsyth's argument that Jackson's "Protest" was made "to repel an assault upon him, by the Senate." The contest was one between the President and the Senate; not between Jackson, the man, and the Senate. No reference to "the man" had been made in Clay's censure resolutions. But Jackson was presented by his defenders as "coming here" in "unpretending poverty" to seek "redress." Such "construction" of the act

could not be agreed to, declared Preston, for Jackson is "always the President when he comes here." He could not use his official character to "open the portals of this Chamber," then "walk up the avenue to your chair," and "throw off the disguise." Sarcastically, Preston went on, supplementing his utterance with energetic hand and arm gestures:

When he presents himself before the Senate, armed and plumed as President, gentlemen are ready to strip him of his official habiliments; to divest him of his Plumes, and bring him hobbling to the door of the Senate, ejaculating--"Pity the sorrows of a poor old man, Whose trembling limbs have borne him to your door."

Preston then spent some time in the destruction of the argument that the sole object of the "Protest" was to "proclaim to all future times that an assault has been made by the Senate on the President of the United States." The "Protest," he urged, was clearly "a stroke aimed at the Constitution intended to violate the Constitution, by overturning and destroying the Senate." It was "war to the knife, and knife to the hilt, against the Senate." Preston did not object to Jackson's appealing to the people, but he did object to one department being required to register the proceedings of another in case of differences "between co-ordinate departments."

One other Forsyth argument remained to be countered. "The gentleman from Georgia," said Preston, "protests against the Opposition's taking the name of Whigs, and recommends them to adopt the name of the Punch party." The refutation of this argument evoked the most colorful declarations of Preston's long speech, and constituted a smashing structural climax. He began his searing reply by declaring

that the coalition did stand "on Whig principles"; and, that the "appellation" had struck "all who were opposed to the Administration with . . . instant and universal sympathy." He then recited the executive usurpations that had drawn "National and Nullifiers" together in their common cause. Jackson had unsheathed the sword against the Nullifiers. Next, he had struck through the Constitution at the Bank. "In vain," declared Preston, "did the venerated instrument resist the Executive mace."

Once more, Preston turned the tables on Forsyth. If the Whig coalition were a "mingled" group, was not the Administration party equally "mingled?" In sweltering sentences, Preston turned Forsyth's unhappy argument against him:

But the gentleman from Georgia says, who are ye? Ye are the sugar men, and the cotton men of the South; the rum men, of the West; and the molasses men of New England. I stand on a cotton bale; where does the gentleman from Georgia stand? Who have we to oppose? A Unit, an Anti-Bank party? Why the gentleman from Georgia is a Bank man. An Anti-Tariff party? Why the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Wilkins) is a Tariff man. An Anti-Internal Improvement party? Why many of the gentleman's colleagues are of that party? . . . . But the gentlemen are all leashed together. . . .

Preston closed with one final thrust. "The Punch Party!" he cried. "Let it go abroad, let it be told in the nurseries, that we are the Punch party, and every one will supply the corollary. Punch and the Devil!"<sup>38</sup>

Preston's reply to Forsyth exemplifies his unique debate style.

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<sup>38</sup>Charleston Mercury, May 28, 1834. Heseckish Niles noted in April: "In New York and Connecticut the term 'Whigs' is now used by the opponents of the administration when speaking of themselves, and they call the 'Jackson men' by the offensive name of 'tories.'" Niles' Weekly Register, XLVI (April 12, 1834), 101.

It also typifies the spirit of the debate on executive usurpation, which had been reopened by Jackson's "Protest." The debate on Poindexter's resolution merely supplied "additional arguments and illustrations to the opposition," and gave higher credence to their theme that an "elective monarchy" was "all but established." The two-week debate terminated in another victory for Clay's forces. By a vote of 27 to 16, the Senate denied Jackson's power to interfere in its actions, and thereby sustained the censure it had already placed upon his own.<sup>39</sup>

While the thundering philippics of the "panic session" were still in progress, the coalition leaders exerted extraordinary efforts outside the halls of Congress to arouse public sentiment against the enemies of the Bank. The major part of the platform work was assigned to Webster, Preston, Poindexter, and McDuffie.

The first round of addresses, given in Philadelphia by Preston and McDuffie was occasioned by a giant rally of the State Rights party at Musical Fund Hall in early April. Hzekiah Niles recorded that "though thousands were in the huge room, other thousands could not get in! It was a complete 'jam.'" Preston first addressed the meeting "at considerable length." He was followed by McDuffie who "spoke with his usual ardency and power. . . ." Of the Carolinians' efforts Niles declared:

Each of these speeches were [sic] received with hearty and continued marks of approbation, and often interrupted with shouts of applause. The like, it is said, had never before been witnessed in Philadelphia. The people were in the

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<sup>39</sup>Bowers, Party Battles of the Jackson Period, 331; Wiltes, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 222.



highest possible state of enthusiasm.<sup>40</sup>

In a subsequent issue of the Register, Niles presented to his reading public the theme of the Carolinians' appeal. They had urged, he wrote, that "all other considerations . . . merged in the great questions which involve the business and prosperity, labor and profits, liberty and safety, of [Philadelphia's] inhabitants."<sup>41</sup>

The itinerant orators parted at Philadelphia, and Preston continued on to Baltimore, a lone ambassador of "the partizans of liberty." Arriving in Baltimore by steamboat on April 19, he was met at Bowley's Wharf by a cheering crowd of "about two thousand persons," who assembled "spontaneously" in a downpour to receive him. When Preston appeared, the cheering crowd immediately called upon him for an address. Niles wrote of his effort:

He commenced from the steamboat, but the cry of "to the exchange" became general and loud, and, in a few minutes, 2,000 persons were in or about the building. Mr. Preston soon appeared, and delivered a brief but very animated address and exhortation, which was received with peals of applause that shook the lofty dome--the crowd being in a state of feverish excitement.<sup>42</sup>

Only a few weeks remained in the "long session" after Preston

<sup>40</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, XLVI (April 19, 1834), 116.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., XLVI (April 26, 1834), 129. "Several public dinners" were tendered the visiting orators in Philadelphia. Preston was the recipient of one such dinner, given by the "Young men of the city," whose invitation to Preston was prompted by their "admiration for his manly character and distinguished abilities. . . ." Philadelphia Enquirer, April 15, 1834, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, April 17, 1834.

<sup>42</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, XLVI (April 26, 1834), 129. A similar account of Preston's speech is given in the Washington National Intelligencer, April 22, 1834.



returned to his seat in the Senate. He participated frequently in the sporadic debates, urging that the public deposits be restored to their proper custody before the session terminated. But when the Senate adjourned on June 28, the public money still remained in the "pet banks."<sup>43</sup>

Preston was little short of jubilant at the outcome of the session. On May 5, following the Senate's rejection of Jackson's nomination for reappointment of four government directors of the Bank by a vote of 30 to 11, Preston wrote to Hammond, "This Administration is killed. The vote of 30 to 11 on the bank . . . has stuck them with terror. . . . [Jackson] no longer plays the lion."<sup>44</sup> Two months later, however, Preston spoke more soberly of the contest between Jackson and the coalition. In a letter written in response to an invitation to a "Whig festival" at Leesburg, Virginia, he declared:

While, however, I appreciate as highly as anyone the importance of the victory already achieved, I cannot regard it as but the first event of a campaign, in which many victories are yet to be won before, the laws and the Constitution are fully vindicated.<sup>45</sup>

During the summer and fall of 1834, the battle between the Democrats and the "Whigs" was continued at the polls. Though the Intelligencer, a strongly partisan "Whig" paper, could claim by September a "Sixth Whig Triumph," the Jackson forces had the better

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<sup>43</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, July 2, 1834.

<sup>44</sup>Preston to James Hammond, Washington, D. C., May 5, 1834, James H. Hammond Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>45</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, July 9, 1834.

of the contest.<sup>46</sup> In the Senate the administration was strengthened by the election in New Jersey of Garrett D. Wall to replace Frélinghuysen, and by Robert J. Walker's victory over Poindexter in Mississippi.<sup>47</sup>

Because of "an illness" suffered in mid-November, Preston did not take his seat in the short session of 1834-35 until December 10--nine days after the Senate had convened. The Intelligencer reported that he had "suffered a stroke of paralysis," and that his condition was "critical."<sup>48</sup> On November 28, the same paper quoted the Philadelphia Enquirer as saying that "the eloquent and bold-hearted champion of the Constitution," had suffered "neither paralysis nor apoplexy" and was much improved.<sup>49</sup> The illness, however, appears to have been sufficiently debilitating to restrict Preston's legislative activities, for he was not so frequent a participant in debate as he had been in the preceding session.

The dominant theme of the short session of the Twenty-third Congress was, as Wiltse observes, foreign relations. In his annual message to Congress, Jackson indicated his concern over the failure of France to honor her treaty obligations of 1832, to pay to the United States twenty-five million francs in reparation for spoliation committed against American commerce during the Napoleonic Wars.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., September 1, 1834.

<sup>47</sup>Bowers, Party Battles of the Jackson Period, 362-365.

<sup>48</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, November 19, 1834.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., November 28, 1834.

His patience strained, Old Hickory asked Congress for a law "authorizing reprisals upon French property in case provision shall not be made for the payment by the French Chambers."<sup>50</sup>

Strangely, Preston did not enter the Senate battle resulting from Jackson's saber-rattling message. Instead, he reserved his energies for debate on a related issue. During the organization of the Senate, Preston was appointed to a select committee of three on "French Spoliations," along with Webster, as chairman, and Grundy of Tennessee. The Committee formulated a bill reported by Webster on December 17, which provided "for the satisfaction of claims due to certain American citizens for spoliations committed on their commerce prior to September 30, 1800."<sup>51</sup> Only "valid claims of indemnity" upon the French government were to be entertained under the provisions of the bill, and no reparation was to be made for such claims as had been provided for in the Treaty of 1832. Finally, the bill called for an "appropriation not to exceed five million dollars" for the "satisfaction" of the claims.<sup>52</sup>

Debate on the bill was launched on December 17 by Webster, who supported the measure on the grounds that the "class of claims" involved could not legally be paid out of the fund of twenty-five million francs provided under the Treaty of 1832. The United States had, he further argued, relinquished the claims referred to in the

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<sup>50</sup>Richard A. McLemore, The French Spoliation Claims, 1816-1836: A Study in Jacksonian Diplomacy, Reprint from the Tennessee Historical Magazine (Vanderbilt University, 1933), 7-13.

<sup>51</sup>Cong. Globe, 23rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 44.

<sup>52</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, December 18, 1834.

bill. Claimants could not seek reparations from the French government; neither could they "be paid out of the twenty-five millions." Therefore, "the injured citizens" would have to be compensated by the United States Government.<sup>53</sup> As Webster concluded, Tyler sprang to his feet to make the point that no American citizen "could come here and ask compensation" for a claim which the United States had relinquished by "a treaty of peace." Benton, "pleased to see that the gentleman from Virginia had opened the debate upon the true grounds," followed Tyler in an inchoate speech of attack in which he expressed his desire that "some gentleman who was capable of doing it [The bill] justice, would make himself master of it, and place it in a strong light before Congress and the American people." He wished "justice" done to these claims. The select committee was made up of a majority in favor of the claims. Furthermore, two of the members, Preston and Grundy, "were so constituted" as not to be able to give "the proper attention" to the bill. Preston, he declared, was not present when he was appointed to the committee; and Grundy was "so swamped" with his duties on the Post Office Committee as to be "wholly unable" to devote attention to the measure. Under such circumstances, concluded the Missouri orator, the Senate could not expect to receive a fair and competent report.<sup>54</sup>

When Benton resumed his seat Preston took the floor. According to one report, he "had been examining into the subject for some time

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., December 19, 1834.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

and collecting information from every source."<sup>55</sup> But he had not expected to speak on the question without further preparation. He had, in fact, taken his seat that morning, "expecting some other senator to occupy the morning session" in discussion of the bill. The duty of carrying the discussion forward thus devolved upon him "unexpectedly." In an account of the occasion, Preston's brother declares:

As soon as it was known in the House . . . that Mr. Preston was speaking there was a rush for the Senate Chamber, and in a very little while every seat was occupied, and the gallery crowded. For two hours he held the audience spellbound; and not even the rustling of a lady's garments broke the silent and absorbed attention of senators and the mixed audience of the galleries.<sup>56</sup>

Preston's extemporaneous effort must have proved a face-reddening experience for the unwary Benton. Though lacking finish in structure, the speech revealed thoroughness of investigation and skill of analysis. It is also noteworthy that Preston's effort on this occasion reveals him in the role of the objective problem-solver. Although he spoke effectively in support of the bill, his speech evinces a desire to explore the question critically.

From a persuasive standpoint, Preston's exordium was masterfully drawn, and was calculated to disarm his auditors. His chief techniques were to reveal himself as a person hard after the truth, and to withhold a statement of his proposition until he had so revealed himself. He began by reminding his listeners that he "came from a section of the country which was generally opposed to the passage of

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<sup>55</sup>Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 146.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

bills of this description. . . ." The implication was clear. If he should propose adoption of the bill, he would not be following blindly the dictates of his constituents. Continuing to reveal himself as a trustworthy person, he affirmed that he "could never advocate the improper taking of funds out of the Treasury." To sustain this declaration, he reminded his auditors of the "course which he had felt himself bound to take at the last session." Preston next proceeded to reveal himself as a person of intellectual integrity. Resisting what must have been a strong desire to deepen the color of Benton's face, he declared with candor that "as a new member, he thought it his duty to devote himself assiduously" to an investigation of the "voluminous" testimony upon which the claims were founded. It had been necessary, he said, "to examine reports consisting of six or eight hundred pages." He had "spared no labor" in his research, "for he was anxious to get at the bottom of the matter."

After thus attempting to inspire his audience with confidence, Preston suggested his position. "As far as he had had an opportunity of judging, from the testimony he had seen, the opinion he had come to was, that the claims were irresistible."

In a moment of rhetorical exaggeration Preston went on to emphasize his opinion, declaring, "instead of the five millions, which were claimed, had the sum been five hundred millions, although it should drain the Treasury, if it were justly due, he would say 'pay it.'"

In support of his position, Preston advanced two arguments: (1) the claims presented were "valid"; (2) the claims presented were "equitable." In the development of his first argument he asserted



that he had personally, through the medium of correspondence and interview, tested the validity of certain petitions. Some of them-- those from his own state--he knew to be valid. In the support of his second contention, he also refuted the Tyler argument that the government could not legally assume the burden of such claims. Preston's position was, in essence, that the United States has, "by the Convention of 1800," used the spoliation claims of United States citizens to "buy ourselves by money out of the compact which we had entered into with France in regard to the Islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique." We had, he continued, offered to pay France "three times the amount" of the spoliation claims to "rid ourselves of the guarantee," but France determined that we should "buy off the guarantee by assuming these claims." Preston drove home his conclusion, declaring, "If . . . we have used the peoples' means to extricate ourselves from the difficulty, we are bound to pay them to the last cent."<sup>57</sup>

In a masterful stroke of logical invention, Preston turned next to Tyler's objection to the legality of the measure. He first demonstrated clearly that the hostilities between France and the United States during the period 1793 to 1800 constituted not "an actual war," but "a quasi-war." It was therefore true, argued Preston, that regardless of the contention of "some gentlemen" to the contrary, the French Government could enter into treaties "on the subject of these spoliation claims."

In his brief peroration, Preston declared that he would be

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<sup>57</sup>The reporter noted at this point: "Here MR. PRESTON was wholly inaudible."

"extremely gratified to be convinced that we are not bound by our consciences to pay these claims." If the claims were "unjust," moreover, he would vote against the measure. His final statement was: "But if I have now taken wrong views of the matter, I demand, at least, the credit of having spoken with sincerity, and from a desire to see justice done to these claimants."<sup>58</sup>

Preston had spoken well. "The style and manner of his delivery," declared one observer, "were in harmony with the highest ideals of senatorial dignity."<sup>59</sup> Besides, as an analysis of the speech text shows, Preston gave credibility to his thesis by a skillful assertion of his abilities and character; he linked his argument with a high motive, namely, the desire to see even-handed justice distributed; and he argued convincingly, from both the constructive and refutatory points of view. In sum, Preston appears to have discovered and employed, in this particular case, "the available means of persuasion."

So effectively had Preston argued that his speech was reported to have "elicited encomiums and praise from Clay, Webster, and others of the brightest intellects of the period."<sup>60</sup> This was Preston's single defense of the spoliation bill, which was debated again briefly by Clay, Calhoun, and Webster on January 12.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, December 19, 1834.

<sup>59</sup>Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 146-147.

<sup>60</sup>Edward K. Graham, The History of Southern Oratory During the Federal Period, 1788-1861, "loc. cit.", 50; Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 147.

<sup>61</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, January 13, 1835.

Significantly, Calhoun spoke against the measure, and also voted against it on February 3, when it was brought to a vote. Preston, voting "yes," saw the measure carried by a vote of 25 to 20.<sup>62</sup>

During the remaining weeks of the short session, Preston gave his wholehearted support to a Calhoun measure to curb executive patronage, entering the running debates on January 27, and February 17.<sup>63</sup> His activities apparently were significantly hampered, for on one occasion he remarked that "the state of his health" would scarcely "admit of" his taking part in the discussion.

As the Twenty-third Congress came to a close, Preston assumed a leading role in the party struggle over the selection of a printer to the Senate. On February 16, he submitted a resolution calling for the selection, which he called up on February 28. After an acrimonious exchange between Benton and Preston, each of whom occupied the floor four separate times, Preston's motion was carried by a vote of 27 to 18. After nine consecutive ballottings, the public printing went to Clay's editors, Gales and Seaton of the Washington National Intelligencer.<sup>64</sup>

After Congress adjourned on March 1, Preston returned to Columbia by way of Suffolk, Virginia, where he "partook of a public dinner tendered him by all parties of Suffolk." The occasion offered a fitting sequel to the Carolina orator's efforts in the Twenty-third

<sup>62</sup>Cong. Globe, 23rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 190.

<sup>63</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, January 30, May 21, 1835.

<sup>64</sup>Cong. Globe, 23rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 250, 307-308; Washington National Intelligencer, March 2, 1835.

Congress. The Norfolk Herald was quoted by the Intelligencer as saying that Preston "addressed the company in his felicitous and fascinating manner, for nearly an hour, and, we learn, made sad havoc in the Jackson ranks, a number of respectable individuals of that party being present."<sup>65</sup>

The character of the battle between the Jackson forces and the coalition changed somewhat during the first session of the Twenty-fourth Congress. The House still belonged to the Administration, and the Senate to the Whig coalition. But the Whig ranks had been thinned. Also, as Wiltse observes, "effective leadership of the opposition forces passed to the Nullifiers." It was Calhoun, not Clay, who assumed direction of the Whig coalition in the Senate during the Twenty-fourth Congress.<sup>66</sup> The leading issue was still the power of the Executive. The major legislative problems of the session were, however, "the question of French relations and the defense preparations thereby entailed," and the financial problems arising out of the Bank battle.<sup>67</sup> It was none of these questions, however, that challenged the interest and efforts of Preston. A new problem arose in the Senate--the slavery question--and it was upon this issue that Preston made his most notable speech of the session.

Before the Senate convened in December, 1835, antislavery agitation in the North had reached crisis dimensions. Event followed

<sup>65</sup>Norfolk (Va.) Herald, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, March 17, 1835.

<sup>66</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 262; Washington National Intelligencer, December 7, 1835.

<sup>67</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 262.

event in the early 1830's which served to arouse public sentiment against the South's "peculiar institution." One such event was the publication in 1829 of an Appeal by David Walker, a free Negro. Walker's inflammatory pamphlet, encouraging the slaves of America to rebel against their oppressive masters, found its way into the hands of slaves in at least five Southern states, and occasioned much alarm. More disturbing to the planting South were the British debates on the emancipation of slaves in the colonies, which "stirred American opponents of slavery to more vigorous action and to more radical proposals." Among these opponents was William Lloyd Garrison who launched in 1831 the Liberator, a newspaper whose pages flamed with invective against the South's cherished institution. The cause of the Garrisonites was abetted by a religious revival which reached its peak in the early 1830's.<sup>68</sup>

But it was not until 1833, when the American Anti-Slavery Society came into being, that there was anything like organized opposition to slavery in the North. Sydnor affirms that it was this group that "gave form and much of the driving force to the abolition movement."<sup>69</sup> The extent to which the movement had progressed by the summer of 1835, is evident from an entry John Quincy Adams made in his Diary on August 11:

There is a great fermentation upon this subject of slavery at this time in all parts of the Union. The emancipation

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<sup>68</sup>Charles S. Sydnor, The Development of Southern Sectionalism 1819-1848 (Baton Rouge, 1948), 222-223.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 232.

of slaves in the British West India Colonies; the Colonization society here; the current of public opinion running everywhere stronger and stronger into democracy and popular supremacy, contribute all to shake the fetters of servitude.<sup>70</sup>

Quick to realize their advantages, the tacticians of the Society seized upon two courses of action. Their first direct assault came in 1835 when they poured upon the smarting South a stream of incendiary publications calculated to destroy slavery, root and branch.<sup>71</sup> This action resulted in a senatorial battle which ended unfavorably for the South.

The abolitionists, who could number senators and representatives among their sympathizers, determined to join the issue. Accordingly, soon after the Twenty-fourth Congress convened, they flooded Congress with petitions praying for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. On January 11, James Buchanan presented the first such memorial from the Caln Quarterly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Pennsylvania. Buchanan, who could not "acquiesce" in the Quakers' conclusions, moved that the memorial be read, and that the prayer of the memorialists be rejected.<sup>72</sup> Buchanan went on to declare that the question of slavery was settled by a resolution in the House of Representatives in March, 1790, which stated, in part, "That Congress have no authority to interfere in the emancipation of slaves, or in the treatment of them within any of the States. . . ."<sup>73</sup> This

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<sup>70</sup>Nevins, (ed.), The Diary of John Quincy Adams, 462.

<sup>71</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 268.

<sup>72</sup>Cong. Globe, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., 83.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.



decision was "final" so far as Buchanan was concerned, and many of his colleagues were of like sentiment. But Calhoun, determined to meet the issue "in the boldest manner,"<sup>74</sup> "demanded that the question be first taken whether the petition be received or not."<sup>75</sup> Thus arose the dangerous issue of the right of petition which was to consume weeks of debate and, ultimately, to end disastrously for Calhoun. But the great Nullifier was not in the mood for "the least concession."

Calhoun pressed the issue determinedly in the Senate debates which ensued, despite obvious division among the Southern delegation, many of whom argued that a refusal to receive was exactly what the abolitionists desired.<sup>76</sup> Throughout the weary weeks of debate, Preston gave Calhoun his wholehearted support, striking his first blow at the abolitionists soon after the presentation of the Caln memorial.<sup>77</sup> It was not, however, until the final week of debate that Calhoun and Preston each delivered a major speech on the subject.

On the afternoon of March 1, both Samuel Prentiss of Vermont and Preston addressed the Senate "at considerable length" on the question.<sup>78</sup> Preston's rhetorical objective was to arouse the Senate to a full realization of the dangers which resided in the abolition

<sup>74</sup>William M. Meigs, The Life of John C. Calhoun, 2 vols. (New York, 1917), II, 144.

<sup>75</sup>Cong. Globe, 24th Cong. 1st Sess., 83.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 79; Benton, Thirty Years in the U. S. Senate, I, 612-614.

<sup>77</sup>Cong. Globe, 24th Cong. 1st Sess., 83.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 215.

movement. During the weeks of debate he had noted "a fatal misconception" on the part of "some gentlemen" in regard to the "perilous circumstances" surrounding the abolition movement. He had observed an air of "supineness," and a tendency to accept the oft-repeated argument that the abolition movement was really the work of "a few misguided fanatics." First advanced by Hill of New Hampshire, the argument became so generally accepted that many senators, among them some Southerners, viewed the antislavery agitation with an air of indifference. Preston hoped to destroy this contention, arouse his listeners' apprehensions, and achieve the adoption of "the strongest measures" against the abolitionists.

Preston spoke for approximately an hour, dividing his time fairly equally between two major topics: (1) the development of abolition sentiment in the United States, and (2) the "present strength" of the abolitionists.<sup>79</sup> Into this basic pattern of the speech proper he fitted his sub-points.

Speaking extemporaneously and without notes, Preston first warned his listeners of the dangers involved in any discussion of the institution of slavery. "In whatever temper you may come to it," he declared, "the discussion is full of danger." He then urged that deliberations on the subject should be untrammelled by "the paltry purposes of party." Next he denied for two reasons the right of Congress to draw the institution of slavery into question. In the

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<sup>79</sup>For complete texts of Preston's "Speech on Abolition Petitions," see Cong. Globe, 24th Congress, 1st Sess., 220-223; Washington National Intelligencer, March 24, 1836; Charleston Mercury, April 19, 1836.

first place, the institution was "guaranteed by the Constitution." In the second place, Congress had no right to assail "the domestic relations of a particular section of the country" of which it was "necessarily ignorant" and "incapable of appreciating."<sup>80</sup>

Turning next to a statement of his purpose, Preston declared, "Before you lend yourself to their [~~The abolitionists'~~] purposes, I wish to say a word or two upon the actual condition of the abolition question; for I greatly fear, from what has transpired here, that it is very insufficiently understood, and that the danger of the emergency is by no means estimated as it ought to be." Before proceeding to the discussion, Preston strove to create the impression of being guided by honorable motives. "God forbid," he exclaimed, "that I should permit any matter of temporary interest or passion to enter into what I am about to tell you." Moreover, if he should "overestimate the magnitude of the dangers" of the abolitionists, it would be "in spite of" himself, against his wishes, "and after the most deliberate consideration."

Moving into the discussion proper, Preston first described in inflammatory phrases the state of "public sentiment."

The bosom of society heaves with new and violent emotions. The general pulse beats stronger and quicker than at any period since the access of the French Revolution. Public opinion labors, like the priestess on her tripod, with the prophecy of great events.

Preston next characterized the state of antislavery sentiment in France, in Germany, and in England. In each of these countries there

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<sup>80</sup>Cong. Globe, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., 221.

were "great movement parties" whose tendency was "to overturn established institutions."

Preston then traced the development of the slavery question in England. Marshalling copious historical examples and testimony, Preston attempted to prove that just as the antislavery movement in England, begun by Clarkson and Wilberforce in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, had resulted in the liberation of slaves in the British Colonies, so the abolition movement in America, which took strength from these same men, would result in the destruction of the South's cherished institution. In England, as in America, the "planters lulled themselves into a fatal security," and the "politicians addressed them as they do us now." The literal analogy was clear.

Before moving to his second major topic, Preston met the objection that "all this is the march of mind . . . before which the institutions of the South must eventually give way." How could it be the "progress of reason" when it is characterized by "such violence and fury as characterize the proceedings of abolitionism?" How could it be the "march of mind" when the abolitionists "know nothing" of the institution which they denounce? After restating his rhetorical aim, Preston then declared, "Let us look at the state of things in our own country."

First, he thanked the gentlemen from the non-slaveholding states for the "strong assurances" they had given "of their decided opposition to the purposes and practices of the abolitionists." He then marshalled factual evidence to support his premise that the abolition movement had reached "perilous proportions." The size of

the movement was alone significant, but more important in Preston's mind, were "the elements of power" from which the movement drew its driving force. This was the factor gentlemen were overlooking.

Consequently, Preston devoted considerable time to an analysis of these "elements of power." To him there were five--five of the most potent sources from which any public movement could derive propulsion: (1) the press; (2) the pulpit; (3) the coffers of "fanatic philanthropists"; (4) the "cry of liberty"; and, (5) the burning fanaticism of all abolitionists. Preston climaxed his analysis in a forceful internal summary, placed in the form of a rhetorical question.

When the war-cry is God and Liberty--when it is thundered from the pulpit, and re-echoed from the press, and caught up and shouted forth by hundreds of societies until the whole land rings with it, shall we alone not hear it, or, hearing it, lay the flattering unction to our souls that it portends nothing?

Such sudden pictorial bursts as this were in their way contributory to Preston's apotheosis as "the Inspired Declaimer."

As Preston moved into his long peroration he utilized chiefly ethical proof. A deep sense of duty impelled him to call upon his friends "to awake to a sense of danger." Furthermore, he reminded his hearers that the problem was one which concerned all who felt, as he did, "a profound veneration for the Constitution," and "an ardent love for the Union." Finally, he expressed his appreciation of "the patriotic feelings" which many members had expressed in regard to the abolitionists.

Preston next addressed himself to "gentlemen from all quarters,

of all parties," in an impassioned plea for immediate and strong measures against the action of the antislaveryites.

Signalize your opposition by the most decided action. Stamp their nefarious propositions with unqualified reprobation. . . . Pledge the authority of each Senator in his own State. Say to the abolitionists that this Government will in no event be made an instrument in your hands. Say to the South that this pestilential stream shall not be poured upon you through these halls. Give us the strongest measures. . . . Save the Union if you can.

Nearing the end of his peroration, Preston departed from the method of conciliation and hurled defiance at the North:

I know that the South has the power and the will to vindicate its rights and protect itself. Even if it were destitute of the high spirit which characterizes it, if it were without the resources which abound there, it would be forced into a position of self-defense by the inexorable necessities of preservation.

In oracular vein, Preston concluded: "Many friends near me see nothing on the horizon but a floating cloud, which the summer breeze will drive away. I see, or think I see, the gathering of a tempest, surcharged with all the elements of devastation."<sup>81</sup>

Preston's speech was ended, but the heated debate in the Senate raged on until, on March 9, Calhoun drew it to a close. At the end of Calhoun's speech a vote was taken, and the result was 36 to 10 in favor of receiving the petitions.<sup>82</sup> The unequivocal

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 223.

<sup>82</sup>Four of the ten nays came from Whigs: Black of Mississippi, Leigh of Virginia, and Nicholas and Porter of Louisiana. Three of the remaining six were Democrats who supported the Administration: Cuthbert, Moore, and Walker; three were Democrats in opposition: Calhoun, White, and Preston. Twelve of the thirty-six members voting to receive were from slave-holding States. Cong. Globe, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., 239.



position taken by the South Carolinians commanded little support from either the coalition or the administration. Many senators, among them Southerners, saw the dangers inherent in the right of petition issue, and could not, therefore, bring themselves to oppose the reception of abolition petitions. It should be noted, on the other hand, that the Senate ultimately voted to dispose of the petitions "by laying on the table the question of reception."<sup>83</sup> Thus, although little different from the Calhoun proposal, this resolution accomplished the same end and represented a slight, though a distinct Southern gain.

The issue of the right of petition, first raised by Calhoun's proposal, was fought concurrently with even greater fury in the House, where John Quincy Adams exerted strenuous opposition to the so-called "gag-resolution." This resolution, presented by a select committee on abolition memorials declared that "all petitions, memorials, resolutions, propositions, or papers, relating in any way . . . to the subject of slavery . . . shall . . . be laid on the table, and . . . no further action whatever shall be had thereon." The "gag-resolution" was carried by a vote of 117 to 68, despite Adams' strenuous opposition.<sup>84</sup>

As one writer has observed, the issue of the right of petition was a subsidiary question, yet a fundamental one which "did more to make sentiment for Abolition than all the agitation of the extremists."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Turner, The United States, 1830-1850, 434.

<sup>84</sup>Bennett Champ Clark, John Quincy Adams (Boston, 1932), 359-360.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 361-362.

The abolitionists' aim was "to weaken and ultimately destroy" slavery "through action and agitation in Congress."<sup>86</sup> By making Congress their sounding board, the petitioners were enabled "to compel even slaveholders to help the cause of abolition." Moreover, as Sydnor points out, "Southern Congressmen, goaded into angry remarks, had fanned the fire they wanted to extinguish. . . ."<sup>87</sup> Preston, like many of his colleagues of the South, by his ardent public declarations in defense of slavery, was thus ironically succoring the cause of his enemies.

Preston's fiery defense of his colleague's "bold" proposal, which the Mercury thought "a worthy specimen of his power as an Orator and his soundness as a statesman,"<sup>88</sup> is significant for two reasons. First, it typifies the Southern position on the slavery question in the mid-1830's. An evolved position, it was the natural result of the ebb and flow of events. As Dickey has observed, the decade of the 1830's was a period of transition "from apology for slavery . . . to the point of uttering defenses of slavery, Biblical, social, and economic." This shift of position, the same writer explains as follows:

That many slaveholding southerners were potential abolitionists in the early years of the nineteenth century cannot be doubted; that in time they felt obliged to defend the institution on account of the activities of the northern abolitionists is equally true. Besides, the enormous expansion of cotton culture and the

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<sup>86</sup>Henry H. Sims, "Analysis of Abolition Literature," The Journal of Southern History, VI (August, 1940), 381.

<sup>87</sup>Sydnor, The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 235.

<sup>88</sup>Charleston Mercury, April 19, 1836.

accompanying demand for slave labor caused the Southerner to find additional grounds for justifying or rationalizing slavery.<sup>89</sup>

Preston's ardent position is thus an understandable one.

In viewing his "Speech on Abolition Petitions" as an instance of persuasion, however, it may be doubted that the speaker made the best use of the rhetorical resources accessible to him. The Mercury editor who published the Preston address in April, believed it was "decidedly the best printed speech we have had from him." True, Preston's aggressive and defiant defense of slavery was ear-tickling to many South Carolinians. His address does reveal a high measure of intrinsic worth. He reasoned cogently through expository detail and argumentation; the totality of the logical content appears adequate to establish credence. But more important, historical reality confirms the validity of his inferences. He was right in his appraisal of the strength and determination of the abolitionists. His vision was acute when he declared the abolitionist movement "a tempest, surcharged with all the elements of devastation."

Finally, Preston couched his argument in his most effective style--a gripping style of force and beauty which was characteristic of his utterances on issues that warmed his imagination and emotions. Through an ever-shifting rhythm of sentence, he conveyed affectively his emotional fervor; by artful management of imagery and rhetorical question, he infused his argument with vividness. Preston's speech is studded with imaginative bursts of real stylistic distinction, which

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<sup>89</sup>Dallas C. Dickey, Sergeant S. Prentiss, Whig Orator of the Old South (Baton Rouge, 1945), 77-78.

reveal him as a close student of speech style. In its stylistic excellence lies the great strength of the speech.

On the other hand, Preston did not use wisely certain means of persuasion accessible to him. For one thing, despite his direct attempts to create good will and reveal desirable character attributes, he, nevertheless, through dogmatic and defiant assertion, disclosed an attitude inimical to his cause. His charge, for example, that some of his senatorial colleagues were "incapable of appreciating" and "necessarily ignorant" of the institution of slavery, while perhaps true, could scarcely have opened the minds of his auditors. Likewise, his saber-rattling claims about the South's "power and will" to "vindicate its rights" demonstrate inept usage of ethical appeal in terms of the nature of the rhetorical situation.

The "motivation" of Preston's speech was also faulty in still other respects. While he did appeal to fair play and altruism, as well as to self-interest, he relied, nevertheless, perhaps too heavily, upon appeals to the emotions of fear, hatred, and anger.

The epilogue to Preston's major effort on the abolition question is worth noting. Debate on Buchanan's motion that "the prayer of the [Gale] petition be rejected," terminated on March 11. Preston entered the debate to say:

I opposed the reception of them [The memorials] as strenuously and as zealously and as perseveringly as I could. . . . I was overruled; and it is a matter of additional regret, that I was overruled by the vote of one-half of the representation of my own section and interests. I am sorry, Sir, that the Senate has received these petitions, but having done so, what is now my duty? On this question I do not hesitate. I

wished the strongest action against the abolitionists.  
Failing in that, I shall go for the next strongest. . . .<sup>90</sup>

Buchanan's motion was carried by a vote of 34 to 6.<sup>91</sup>

Discouraged at the outcome of the abolition fight, Preston wrote to his friend, Francis Lieber, the German-born scholar, on March 12, "Public affairs are in a very disheartening condition. . . . How much better than mine is your mode of life, having as you do almost the spirits of the wise and good of other times. . . . I Envy you. . . ."<sup>92</sup>

Before the long session ended, however, Preston found an issue which aroused his interest and fired his zeal. That issue was the recognition of Texas independence. Though he made no notable speech on the question in the Senate, he did assume the lead in publicizing the Texan cause. The question of Texas independence did not attract national attention until the rebellious Texans defeated the Mexican forces at San Jacinto on April 21, 1836. Following this event, the "people were exalted," and in the United States a "general desire for Texan independence prevailed."<sup>93</sup> Petitions requesting the recognition of Texan independence soon made their appearance on the Senate floor, the first of which was presented by Preston on May 9, from "a meeting of citizens assembled in Philadelphia. . . ." Preston's

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<sup>90</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, March 14, 1836.

<sup>91</sup>Cong. Globe, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., 248.

<sup>92</sup>Preston to Lieber, Washington, D. C., March 12, 1836, Francis Lieber Papers, South Caroliniana Library.

<sup>93</sup>Benton, Thirty Years' View, I, 665; Turner, The United States, 434.

"remarks" on the memorial, declared the Washington Intelligencer, "produced a debate of much animation and interest" which lasted an hour.<sup>94</sup> On May 16, Willie P. Mangum of North Carolina read a similar memorial, requesting "the co-operation of Mr. Preston, Clay, and Benton in promoting the object sought for. . . ." In the course of his remarks, "in return for the compliment," Preston voiced his position on the problem. The United States, he declared, should not interfere "until the Texans should have a government de facto to be recognized."<sup>95</sup>

Preston's position was accepted by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which presented on June 18 a "unanimous" report on Texas independence which concluded with the resolution:

The independence of Texas ought to be acknowledged by the United States whenever satisfactory information shall be received that it has in successful operation a civil government, capable of performing the duties and fulfilling the obligations of an independent power.<sup>96</sup>

Continuing in his role as the leading Senatorial champion of Texan independence, Preston moved on July 1 to take up the resolution of the Foreign Relations Committee. In the course of his "remarks" on the resolution, he declared that "he had with difficulty restrained himself from offering an amendment to recognise the independence of Texas immediately."<sup>97</sup> After debate ended, Preston called for the

<sup>94</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, May 10, 1836.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., May 17, 1836.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., June 19, 1836.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., July 2, 1836.



yeas and nays, and the resolution was carried unanimously.<sup>98</sup> Thus, before the session closed, Preston had managed to push the Texas question to a temporary settlement, and thereby to inspire jubilation among the "friends of Texas."<sup>99</sup>

Soon after Congress adjourned, Preston was honored for his "advocacy of the Texan cause on the floor of the senate," by a dinner given at the American Hotel in New York to "certain zealous friends of Texas."<sup>100</sup>

In response to the first toast, which was "complimentary to him," Preston delivered "an eloquent speech." The New York Star said of it:

A deep stillness reigned throughout this compactly crowded audience during the whole time that they were listening to, or more properly speaking, devouring with ecstasy the silver tongued and all-absorbing beauties which glittered and dazzled like the course of a meteor through the heavens before those who had the incomparable happiness to be present on this occasion.<sup>101</sup>

Significantly, Preston concluded his address with the following toast: "The Western and Pacific progress of our language and our liberty."<sup>102</sup>

During the second session of the Twenty-fourth Congress, the

<sup>98</sup>Cong. Globe, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., 604.

<sup>99</sup>Samuel P. Carson to David G. Burnet, Washington, D. C., July 3, 1836, in George P. Garrison (ed.), "Diplomatic Correspondence of the Republic of Texas," Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1907, 2 vols. (Washington, D. C., 1908), II, 101.

<sup>100</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, L (July 23, 1836), 345.

<sup>101</sup>New York Star, n.d., quoted, *ibid.* Preston continued to champion the Texas cause, and upon the question of annexation, which made its appearance in the succeeding Congress, he made one of his ablest senatorial addresses.

<sup>102</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, L (July 23, 1836), 345.

"inspired declaimer" had proved an able member once more of the loosely-knit coalition. Before Congress adjourned, however, there were in evidence certain signs that his political sympathies were wavering between the Clay and Calhoun branches of the coalition. As yet there were no positive indications of a rupture between him and Calhoun, but he had not followed implicitly in the lead of the new coalition director, as the voting record of the two senators shows. Particularly significant was their divided vote on Clay's bill to distribute among the states the proceeds from the sale of public lands. This measure, a favorite of Clay, had been opposed by Calhoun, as Wiltse notes, "on each of its many appearances since he entered the Senate. . . ."<sup>103</sup> On May 4, the bill was brought to a vote, and was passed by a close margin of 25 to 20. Calhoun registered a negative vote, while Preston voted affirmatively with Clay and Webster.<sup>104</sup> On the question of recognition of Texas, moreover, there appears to have been some differences of opinion between Preston and Calhoun. Available correspondence of both men contains no reference to it; neither do the reports of Senate debates. Preston's wife, the thirty-four-year-old Washington socialite, referred to the altercation, however, in her Diary in 1838, when the question of Texas annexation was being fought out in the Senate.

Mr. Calhoun, 2 years ago [1836], vehemently opposed Mr. Preston's laying the claims of Texas in any shape before the Senate, and placed his paper, The Telegraph, edited

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<sup>103</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 264.

<sup>104</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, May 5, 1836.

by Duff Green, in an attitude to kill both Mr. Preston, and the Texas question. It became a popular move, however, and Mr. Calhoun naturally shifted in favor of Texas. . . .<sup>105</sup>

Upon what grounds Calhoun opposed Preston's pro-Texas activities is not at all clear. That he did vote for the bill to recognize Texas, however, is certain. Moreover, he spoke in support of the bill, indicating that he considered recognition "as a prelude to ultimate admission to the Union."<sup>106</sup>

Evidently, the high-bred Virginian was already beginning to chafe under the domination of Calhoun. Benjamin F. Perry, who knew Preston well, recalled:

Colonel Preston thought Mr. Calhoun seemed to think that he ought in all matters to follow implicitly in his lead. This antira surrender of his judgment to that of another was what . . . Preston could not tolerate, and his proud spirit rebelled against all dictation.<sup>107</sup>

For her part, Mrs. Preston felt that Calhoun had "demeaned himself very ungenerously" towards her husband.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>105</sup>Diary of Mrs. Penelope Preston, 13. The thirty-three-page manuscript of Mrs. Preston's diary, assigned to the dates June, 1834 - June, 1838, contains many arresting comments on Washington social life, national affairs, and prominent political, literary, and religious figures. Among the political figures discussed are Webster, Clay, Calhoun, Prentiss, Rhett, Buchanan, Van Buren, Crittenden, Forsyth, Allan of Ohio, and Waddy Thompson.

<sup>106</sup>Cong. Globe, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., 604; Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 291.

<sup>107</sup>Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men, II, 61. Perry recorded that the "same complaint of Mr. Calhoun," had been made by both Stephen D. Miller, Preston's predecessor in the Senate, and James H. Hammond.

<sup>108</sup>Diary of Mrs. Penelope Preston, 10. She goes on to say: "I have so long respected and admired Mr. Calhoun, that I shall try to suspend my judgment of him and his conduct for the present, and also strive to keep quiet, if not kind blood, between him and my husband."

As yet no open rupture had occurred between Preston and his colleague, but Preston's political conduct apparently had been such as could hardly have inspired confidence in his loyalty to the Calhoun faction. Moreover, opposition to him was not long in developing in the state.

As one student has observed, "the first organized opposition to Preston seems to have taken place during the election of 1836."<sup>109</sup> Evidently Preston preferred the governorship to his Senate seat, but after reconnoitering the ground, he decided that he could not win against Pierce Butler. "During the campaign," also, "it was rumored that Preston and Calhoun were about to have a rupture, that Calhoun was suspicious of Preston, and that Preston was 'inclined to give countenance' to President Van Buren."<sup>110</sup> Preston strove to minimize the significance of the episode, but the experience had been discouraging--so much so that he was inclined to leave public life. Mrs. Preston wrote that "the Aloes the State has lately put upon her breast" had "nearly weaned" her husband from "public life," and that he therefore "believes he will resign before next session."<sup>111</sup> But Preston did not submit his resignation; instead, he accepted re-election to the Senate.

The South Carolina legislature, meeting in late November, recorded no trace of the rumored rift between the two men, for it

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<sup>109</sup>Ernest M. Lander, Jr., "The Calhoun-Preston Feud, 1836-1842," Unpublished paper read before the Twenty-second Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Durham, N. C., November 17, 1956.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Diary of Mrs. Penelope Preston, 10.

returned Preston to his Senate seat for a term of six years by a handsome majority of 125 to 8.<sup>112</sup> Commenting on the outcome of the election, the Mercury, a warm supporter of Calhoun, declared the rumor that Preston had "gone over to Van Buren" to be "utterly false," and sought to gloss over the whole affair. It affirmed: "The best understanding exists between Messrs. Preston, Calhoun, and the other leading Nullifiers of our State; and the present session of our State Legislature . . . has been marked by a harmonious concert of action."<sup>113</sup> The Telescope, in a veiled warning to Preston, said of the election:

This is a testimony of the approbation of his State, to which he cannot fail to be warmly sensible; and which will, as certainly, serve only to stimulate him to exertions if possible still more zealous than the very high ones which have won his present and well-deserved distinctions.<sup>114</sup>

Preston's political loyalties were brittle, however, as subsequent events were to prove. That he had not already abandoned Calhoun is doubtless due in part to his fear of being purged by Calhoun just as Henry Finckney had already been sacrificed for opposing Calhoun in the House on the question of the reception of abolition petitions. Such, at least, were the sentiments of Joel R. Poinsett, who wrote in October to James Campbell:

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<sup>112</sup>Miles' Weekly Register, LI (December 17, 1836), 241. The Columbia Telescope reported that Preston was reelected "without opposition." Columbia Telescope, December 7, 1836, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, December 14, 1836.

<sup>113</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 14, 1836.

<sup>114</sup>Columbia Telescope, December 7, 1836, quoted in Charleston Mercury, December 10, 1836.

If they [The nullification leaders] had failed in punishing Pinckney I believe his example would have been followed by many of Mr. C's former adherents. They begin to perceive that to follow his fortunes is to adhere to the fallen and are ready to abandon him if they dared, Preston among the first & the chief.<sup>115</sup>

Whatever may have been Preston's personal inclinations, he did not now choose to join the issue with Calhoun. During the last short session under Jackson, which met on December 5, 1836, the two senators acted in concert. The business of the session contained no issues that could strain their tenuous political ties and test the strength of Preston's loyalty. In fact, the character of the session was such as to inspire at least temporary harmony between them. Their common enemy, Jackson, now had in both houses a healthy majority. Also, one of the chief issues of the session involved the Benton resolution to vindicate Jackson publicly by expunging from the Senate journal the censure placed there by the coalition two years earlier. Against the Benton measure, both Preston and Calhoun fought bitterly, each playing a major role in the final debate.

It was this resolution to expunge that drew from Preston his last significant oratorical effort under the Jackson regime. While he entered the debates on various other questions--the admission of

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<sup>115</sup>Joel R. Poinsett to James Campbell, The Homestead, S. C., October 20, 1836, in Samuel G. Stoney (ed.), "Poinsett-Campbell Correspondence," South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine, XLII (January, 1941), 150-151. Pinckney was replaced in the House of Representatives by Hugh S. Legare in the fall election of 1836. Niles' Weekly Register, LI (November 26, 1836), 195.



Michigan,<sup>116</sup> the recognition of Texas,<sup>117</sup> the extension of copy-rights to foreign authors,<sup>118</sup> abolition in the District of Columbia,<sup>119</sup> regulation of Marine Corps pay,<sup>120</sup> and the reduction of the tariff,<sup>121</sup> his only notable and fully-reported speech was prompted by the expunging resolution.

Benton first introduced a resolution to expunge from the Senate journal the censure of Jackson on March 16, 1836.<sup>122</sup> But the motion was not even debated briefly until June 30, and the Jackson ranks were too thin to vindicate their hero. The Intelligencer reported that the "expunge" was "left to the sleep of oblivion."<sup>123</sup> But Benton, who had committed himself "irrevocably to the prosecution of the 'expunging resolution,'" was not to be shaken from his course.<sup>124</sup> Accordingly, when he found an administration majority in the Senate, he acted promptly. The following December, he reintroduced the censure

<sup>116</sup>Register of Debates in Congress, 14 vols. (Washington, D. C., 1825-1837), XIII, 256.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 797, 1010, 1013.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 670, 697. Preston was placed on a select committee of five with Clay, Webster, Buchanan, and Ewing to consider a memorial presented to the Senate from a number of British authors asking the passage of a copyright law to protect their literary interests.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 713.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 535.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 875, 928, 932, 957, 962.

<sup>122</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, March 17, 18, 1836.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., July 25, 1836; Cong. Globe, 23rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 325.

<sup>124</sup>Benton, Thirty Years' View, I, 428.

resolution, which provided that "black lines" should be drawn around the resolution of censure, and that "across the face thereof" should be written the words: "Expunged by order of the Senate this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, in the year of our Lord 1837."<sup>125</sup> Benton's resolution was made the order of the day, and on January 12 it was debated at length by Benton, Crittenden, and Dana of Maine. The Missouri orator's "paen of anticipated triumph" initiated a fast-moving and animated debate which lasted three days. On January 13, "some of the great orators of the opposition were put forward to oppose the resolution." After Dana concluded the speech he had begun the day before, the debate was resumed by Preston.<sup>126</sup>

Preston, like all the members of the opposition, could hardly hope to prevent the passage of Benton's resolution. But he could express freely his disapprobation of the act which was to be perpetrated before the very eyes of the old coalition members. Such was his stated aim when he arose to speak on January 13.

Preston's effort, which exemplifies the emotional and colorful type of address for which was most noted, is unique for several reasons. In the first place, it constitutes almost wholly a direct and scathing attack upon the supporters of Jackson in general, and upon one "expunger," Judah Dana, in particular. More than in any other of his senatorial speeches, the Carolinian leaned in this speech upon argumentum ad

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 718-720.

<sup>126</sup>Cong. Globe, 24th Cong., 2nd Sess., 93; Bowers, Party Battles of the Jackson Period, 462-463; Niles' Weekly Register, LI (January 21, 1837), 331-332.

hominem; more than in any other he indulged in bitterness toward his opponents, which he expressed through stinging sarcasm, caustic repartee, and venomous ridicule. The speech is also unique in the matter of style. In no other of his addresses did Preston employ with such fullness and effectiveness the rhetorical devices for securing vividness. He diffused his discourse with evocative figures, employed eighty-one rhetorical questions, relied on first and second person pronouns, analogies, examples, historical allusions, references to the immediate surroundings, and invented monologues. Furthermore, in no other of his speeches did Preston make so much use of the ethical attribute of probity. While attempting to associate himself with virtuous and elevated actions and motives, he, at the same time, attempted to link his opponents and their cause with what was dishonorable. Finally, the address is signally wanting in substantial argument, constructive or refutatory. While Preston did attack Dana's speech, he, nevertheless, avoided constructive argument altogether. In fact, he made it clear at the outset that he had no intention of entering "upon the argument."<sup>127</sup>

Preston saturated his melodramatic exordium with ethical and emotive materials. In his opening sentences, he declared that he had found himself incapable of withholding his "expression of utter repugnance." He then went on to recount the events that had led up to the expunging proceedings--events which filled him with "inexpressible sorrow and dismay." His sorrow, he said, had "turned to despair"

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<sup>127</sup>For this version of Preston's speech, see Cong. Globe, 24th Cong., 2nd Sess., 135-138.

when certain state legislatures had instructed their senators to vote for the Benton resolution. "But there was still one ingredient to be added to this cup, to render the odious draught more intolerably bitter." Virginia, his native state, "was brought to bow her venerable locks before the footstool of power." But he could "take consolation" that South Carolina, "a free and fearless State," had kept itself "aloof from this combination." Doubtless with an eye upon his crumbling political fortunes, he went on to say that it was in South Carolina's behalf that he now protested "this open and flagrant violation of the constitution."

Preston next entered upon the first division of his speech proper which constituted an elaborate and dramatic argumentum ad populum. Beginning his blighting attack on the "expungers," he cried:

The argument is exhausted . . . the executioners are here with ready hands. Exercise your function gentlemen. . . . The axe is in your hand; perform that which is loudly called for. Execution, sir? Of what? Of whom? Is the axe aimed at me, and at those of us who voted for the resolution you are about to expunge? Is it us you strike at? If so, I would say, and with comparative satisfaction, in God's name, let the blow come, and while the fatal edge fell upon my neck, I would declare, with honest sincerity, that I had rather be the criminal of 1834 than the executioner of 1836.

Under the spur of a delighted gallery audience, Preston continued to fulminate against the expungers, charging them next with both maliciousness and stupidity:

Are there no words to express a difference of opinion? Cannot you state the strength of your convictions in all the compass of your mother tongue? No. You must do a physical act. You must put nothing on record.

You must perform a deed. You must do something that has no precedent. . . .

In a theatrical flourish, the mercurial Preston climaxed his slashing attack:

Why not expunge those who made the record? . . . Men who entered so foul a page upon your journals cannot be worthy of a seat here. Remove us. Turn us out. Expel us from the Senate. Would to God you could. Call in the praetorian guard. Take up--apprehend us--march us off.

Preston next turned his attention to Dana and to his arguments. Dana had declared that the expunging resolution was "merely a strong mode of expressing an opinion."<sup>128</sup> "I put it to the candor of the honorable gentleman," Preston retorted, "whether this is a mere expression of opinion." He felt that while the censure of 1834 was only "an expression of a difference of opinion," the expunging resolution was calculated to be a "record of personal spite." He next considered Dana's speech as a whole. It was merely "a palinode . . . sung to the honor and glory of the President of the United States." Then, after painting Dana as a fawning sycophant, Preston applied a brilliant reductio ad absurdum:

He puts the resolution on the ground of a eulogy of the President. That is the sole argument. Because Jackson is praiseworthy, and glorious, expunge, expunge. . . . General Jackson is to be praised; that forms the premises of his argument. This record is to be expunged; that is the conclusion. . . .

The Carolinian could not resist the temptation to have a moment of fun at the expense of the incautious Dana. In his eulogistic remarks on Jackson, Dana had declared, "Andrew Jackson has no equal; his whole

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<sup>128</sup>For Dana's "Speech on the Expunging Resolution," see *ibid.*, 89.

life is a miracle. See him in youth, a fatherless, friendless, penniless boy, the son of a foreigner, a stranger in a strange land. Examine him in every stage of his existence, and we are impelled to exclaim, wonderful man!" With a flash of witty repartee, Preston declared that the senator from Maine had stated a "novel fact" in reference to Jackson.

He told us that the President was miraculous. But the miracle, it seems, lies in the fact that he was born a foreigner, and is President of the United States. Sir, General Jackson, I admit, has overcome great difficulties. . . . But I never knew until I was now officially informed, that he was born in Ireland. [a laugh]

Resuming his attack on the proposed action of the Senate, Preston challenged his colleagues. Would they think of vindicating "the ashes of the illustrious dead by removing from the national archives all traces of difference of opinion on the part of either House of Congress from the departed saviors of . . . [The] country?" He imbued his idea with vividness by making use of the physical environment. Pointing to Washington's picture on the wall of the Senate chamber, he asked:

Dare the honorable Senator from Pennsylvania [Buchanan] rise in his place, and with a reverend regard to yonder picture of Washington, introduce a resolution to expunge whatever on our Journal intimates a difference of opinion from that great man?

Now making use of the invented monologue to dramatize his thought, Preston suggested that of this "deed" Washington would say, "Destroy not your Constitution. Dishonor not your own archives. Draw no black lines upon your Journal on my account. . . . I desire you to play off no mountebank farce for my glory."



Preston continued to ridicule the expunging resolution in his long peroration and to express his own feelings of "sorrow" and "revulsion." He shamed the expungers, and in the next breath appealed to their sense of honor and fair play. He sought to enhance his probity and to detract from that of the expungers. Concluding, he declared emotionally, "All I feel now is for the Senate--is for the Constitution--is for the Country."

To an age that apotheosized the orator and delighted in "oratorical display," Preston's speech was a commanding performance. Typical of the commentary on it is that of Gales and Seaton, who informed their readers that "within the last week the Senate Chamber has been the theatre of several very favorable exhibitions of true eloquence," among which were "the brilliant displays of Oratory" from Crittenden, Preston and Clay "in opposition to the Expunging proposition."<sup>129</sup> Also worthy of note is the comment of Nathan Sargent, a Senate gallery listener, who declared that "Preston spoke in a strain of eloquence inspired by his feelings of great aversion."<sup>130</sup>

In the cold light of rhetorical analysis, however, Preston's "Speech on the Expunging Resolution" was not of the highest intrinsic merit. If the "true desideratum of discourse" is the "enforcement of ideas through logical means,"<sup>131</sup> then the speech was patently not one of real significance. Substituting caustic invective for logical

<sup>129</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, January 17, 1837.

<sup>130</sup>Nathan Sargent, Public Men and Events, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1875), I, 334.

<sup>131</sup>See Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird, Speech Criticism (New York, 1948), 382.

demonstration, Preston aimed only to express his feelings of "utter repugnance." Emotive materials--the "accessories of the art of rhetoric"--predominate in almost every portion of the address--so that its ideational content was but a colorful restatement and dramatization of the arguments of preceding opposition speeches. Furthermore, one might ask: Was Preston actuated by loftiness of purpose, by elevated motives? Or did he intend simply to inflict hurt on certain of his colleagues? Again, was he honestly communicating? Or did he wish only to parade his rhetorical virtuosity before an admiring gallery audience? In sum: the real significance of Preston's effort would seem not to lie in the intrinsic worth of the speech, but in the light that it sheds upon Preston's rhetorical practice.

Preston's severely denunciatory effort did not end the debate. Other Whigs and some Democrats came forward to denounce the measure. But the "dead" was to be done. The "people had spoken," and Benton, seeing that he had the numerical strength to carry his resolution, pressed for a decision. Finally, on January 16, the measure was carried by a vote of 24 to 19.<sup>132</sup> The "solemn force" was consummated, and Old Hickory, nearing retirement, was publicly whitewashed. To Benton the event was the climax of a "seven years' contest" with the Bank of the United States.<sup>133</sup> To the opposition, it was an outrageous expression of personal spite.

The battle over the expunging resolution represents the last

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<sup>132</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, LI (January 21, 1837), 331-332; Claude M. Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2 vols. (Boston, 1930), II, 54.

<sup>133</sup>Benton, Thirty Years' View, I, 727-729.

occasion on which Preston fought under the banner of the coalition in concert with Calhoun, who chose to support the incoming democratic administration of Van Buren. Preston, on the other hand, a Whig convert, chose to remain in the Clay camp, thereby deserting the "priest of the Nullifiers." As the second session of the Twenty-fourth Congress ended, however, relations between the two senators were, on the surface at least, harmonious.

On their return home from Washington both attended a public dinner tendered to them and William John Grayson, by "the citizens of Charleston." The Mercury was quoted by Gales and Seaton as saying of the event:

MR. CALHOUN, MR. PRESTON, and the HON. WM. J. GRAYSON, Severally responded to toasts, in speeches which held the audience enchained in delightful attention to a late hour in the night. Each of the orators spoke with more than his usual animation and eloquence; and the harmony and elevated pleasure of the evening was not broken by a single disagreeable incident.<sup>134</sup>

The ensuing struggle between Preston and Calhoun for political ascendancy in South Carolina, is more readily understood in the light of Thomas Cooper's synthesis of "what leading and thinking men" of the state said of the two combatants. In less than a month after the Charleston dinner, Cooper wrote to Nicholas Biddle:

they are both able, and honest men; both regarded throughout the State, rather as looking steadily at the central Government than as guided by a purely South Carolinian [Sic] spirit. They are therefore not popular. Calhoun is rather borne with, than supported. He has talent, but without tact or Judgement. . . . Preston has more talent, more tact,

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<sup>134</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, March 27, 1837.

more judgement, and is as honest as Calhoun. They are on the field of political competition. Preston is more approved. But he is too much of a diplomat: too much non-committal; too Van Buerenish [sic] but much superior to Van Buren. People distrust him from his manner, more than they ought. But he is not popular. He has not the leading mark of a great man, he cannot attach to himself a corps of personal thorough-going friends.<sup>135</sup>

As subsequent events demonstrated, the very deficiencies of Preston's character and ability reported by Cooper, proved in large measure to be Preston's political undoing. He had already reached the apex of his political career, and within little more than a year he would be publicly branded as "An alien by birth and a traitor to the State of his adoption."<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>Thomas Cooper to Nicholas Biddle, n. p., May 14, 1837, quoted in Ernest M. Lander, Jr., "Dr. Thomas Cooper's Views in Retirement," South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine, LIV (October, 1953), 177. The date of the letter is taken from Robert Gray Gunderson, "A Political and Rhetorical Study of the 1840 Presidential Campaign," Ph. D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1948, 330.

<sup>136</sup>Quoted in Jervey, Robert Y. Hayne and His Times, 462.

## CHAPTER VIII

### "FRIEND AND FOLLOWER OF HENRY CLAY"

When Martin Van Buren, Jackson's personally chosen successor, was inaugurated March 4, 1837, a nationwide business reaction was well underway. The "New York magician" was as yet unaware, however, that the economic heritage of Jackson's administrations would be the Panic of 1837, termed by McGrane, "one of the most disastrous crises this nation has ever experienced."<sup>1</sup>

The business collapse, which occurred within two months after Van Buren took office, was the direct outgrowth of Jackson's financial policy, which included the destruction of Biddle's bank and the subsequent removal of the federal deposits. The government funds had been placed in the "pet banks" without adequate government controls. Since the Bank of the United States no longer received the notes of other banks in payment of government dues, Biddle could no longer "regulate the bank paper that constituted in fact the currency of the country."<sup>2</sup> The pet banks used the federal funds as speculative capital, extending their loans recklessly. Moreover, the hope of securing a portion of the federal deposits led to the creation of hundreds of new banks, all of which expanded their credit, using the government funds

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<sup>1</sup>Reginald C. McGrane, The Panic of 1837: Some Financial Problems of the Jacksonian Era (Chicago, 1924), 1.

<sup>2</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 216.

as a windfall capital. Such vast extension of credit stimulated wild speculation in public land, over trading, and investment in dubious enterprises, which led inevitably to an inflated currency.<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime, Jackson strove by various palliatives to save the tottering economy. One of these measures was the Specie Circular of 1836, which "required payments for public land to be made in gold and silver." The object of the Jackson order was to "prevent the absorption of the public lands by speculators and to check the accumulation in the Treasury of bank notes, many of which would doubtless prove inconvertible." The Specie Circular checked the upward spiral, but probably contributed to the Panic of 1837 by crowding gold and silver out of circulation.<sup>4</sup>

Early in 1837, the downward spiral began. To protect themselves, the banks sharply curtailed credit. Bread riots in New York in February were followed in a matter of weeks by the failure of a New York banking house. Unable to redeem in specie, other banks failed in rapid succession. "Credit tightened, specie fled the country, and in its wake the shades of depression fell fast across the country."<sup>5</sup>

The crisis became acute on May 8 and 9 when a "prolonged run on the New York banks drained them of a million dollars in specie." On May 10, the New York banks suspended specie payment, and other

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<sup>3</sup>David Kinley, "The Independent Treasury of the United States and Its Relation to the Banks of the Country," Senate Documents No. 587 (Washington, 1910), 28-29.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>5</sup>Schlesinger, The Age of Jackson, 218.



banks followed suit across the nation.<sup>6</sup>

General suspension of specie payments made it imperative that the new president take some positive and immediate action. Since federal officials could lawfully receive and disburse only the notes of specie-paying banks, and since the deposit banks had suspended specie payments along with the other banks, the fiscal machinery of the government was halted. On May 15, Van Buren issued a proclamation calling Congress in special session on the first Monday in September.<sup>7</sup>

Three alternatives were open to Van Buren. He could maintain Jackson's "pet bank" system, he could resuscitate Biddle's bank, or he could "urge the separation of the fiscal affairs of the government from all banks." He resolved upon the untried course, and in his message to the special session proposed the Sub-Treasury system, or Independent Treasury, whereby the government would use the customs houses, post offices, and land offices for the collection and disbursement of federal funds.<sup>8</sup>

Van Buren's proposed "experiment," referred to commonly as "the divorce of bank and state," posed the fundamental question: should the business community or the government manage the fiscal affairs of the government? It was a question which seemed to deepen the "dilemma" into which the South had already fallen.

<sup>6</sup>McGrane, The Panic of 1837, 93.

<sup>7</sup>Kinley, "The Independent Treasury," loc. cit., 33.

<sup>8</sup>Schlesinger, The Age of Jackson, 227; Niles' National Register, LIII (September 2, 1837), 11-16.

Should the ruling class of the South ally itself to the upper class of the North, and thus to broad construction, capitalism and conservatism, or to the lower classes of the North, and thus to State rights, agrarianism and reform?<sup>9</sup>

In terms of political alignment, the question faced by Southern statesmen was whether to amalgamate with the Whigs in their battle against "radicalism," or to unite with the Democrats in their struggle against "business rule." Preston's answer to the question was diametrically opposite to that of his colleague, and his analysis of the situation exerted a profound impact on his future political and oratorical career.

Calhoun, who had fought with Preston under the Whig banner since 1833, "resolved to await the views of the two great parties before publicly announcing his own, and then to act accordingly."<sup>10</sup> Four days after the special session convened, he wrote: "I have taken my stand. I go against the chartering of a United States Bank, or any connection with Biddle's or any other bank. . . . We will divide. My colleague, as I understand him, goes for Biddle's bank, and will probably take a portion of the representatives with him. . . ."<sup>11</sup> Calhoun's shift toward Van Buren caught the ever-loyal Mercury out of step, for its editor had assumed that Calhoun would continue to oppose the Jackson party. On September 11, the Mercury issued a scathing indictment of Van Buren's message to Congress, and as late as

<sup>9</sup>Schlesinger, The Age of Jackson, 244.

<sup>10</sup>Meigs, Life of John C. Calhoun, II, 190.

<sup>11</sup>"Calhoun Correspondence," loc. cit., 277.

September 16 seemed not to have known of Calhoun's new course.<sup>12</sup>

Calhoun's decision may have perplexed many of his supporters, but he "saw the ground" clearly, and in his public speeches and letters expressed his views with clarity and forthrightness. For a decade he had been battling "with and against every party, without blending with any," in defense of state rights principles. Were the Nullifiers to amalgamate with the Whigs in opposition to the Independent Treasury, the Whigs would be placed in power. Committed to consolidation, the Whigs would restore the big bank, and "centralize the currency and exchanges," thereby renewing "that system of unequal and oppressive legislation which had impoverished the staple states."<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, by uniting with the Van Burenites to keep government and banks separate, Calhoun reasoned that each section would be able to enjoy "what commerce it could command." Van Buren had been "driven into a position" favorable to the advancement of state rights doctrine. Would not an amalgamation of Nullifiers and Jacksonian Democrats open the way for "a union of the entire South" on old state rights grounds? Should not Calhoun then avail himself of the opportunity to achieve his long-sought-for objectives?<sup>14</sup> The Sub-Treasury scheme was, moreover, the soundest mode of relieving the nation's financial distress and of developing a sound fiscal policy. The action of Biddle's bank and

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<sup>12</sup>Charleston Mercury, September 11, 16, 1837.

<sup>13</sup>Alexandria Gazette, quoted in Niles' National Register, LIII (September 16, 1837), 33.

<sup>14</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, December 4, 1837; "Speech on the Sub-Treasury," Niles' National Register, LIII (October 7, 1837), 87.

the deposit banks had made the separation of government from them necessary. The whole banking system was, in fact, inimical to liberty and republican equality. It was not only practicable but desirable that the government do away with bank paper and establish its own inconvertible paper as the true currency.<sup>15</sup>

Preston, on the other hand, analyzed the situation in quite a different manner. He disagreed entirely that the objectives of the union of Whigs and Nullifiers had been accomplished. Since its inception in 1833-1834, the common aim of the coalition had been the destruction of the "power and patronage party." That party, now under the leadership of the wily Van Buren, was hardly to be considered "prostrated" by virtue of an "empty treasury" and a "negligible majority in both houses." It was, in fact, still "meditating schemes of power." Since it was considerably weakened, however, the time was propitious for its complete destruction. Were the labors of five years now to be sacrificed? Was the coalition to cast away its finest opportunity to terminate the reign of the "expungers"--to demolish the authors of the "bloody bill?" Wisdom would dictate, believed Preston, that the amalgamation of Nullifiers and Whigs should be now consummated.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 354-357; Preston to Willie F. Mangum, Washington, D. C., October 4, 1837, Willie Person Mangum Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>16</sup>Running Senate debate on the Sub-Treasury, September 26, 1837, Niles' National Register, LIII (October 7, 1837), 87; Preston's "Speech on the Sub-Treasury," Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 1st Sess., 85-88; Preston to his Richland constituents, September 3, 1838, quoted in Charleston Mercury, September 18, 1838.

Unlike Calhoun, moreover, Preston believed the Sub-Treasury scheme neither practicable nor desirable, despite the plethora of argument in its favor. If by the separation of government from banks was meant that the Executive should be dispossessed of all control over these institutions which might be subject to abuse for party purposes, he concurred in such a plan. But he was convinced that the Independent Treasury would confer increased executive patronage, and thus bestow more power upon the President. Besides, he resented the measure as an attack on the banks and the whole credit system of the nation, and regarded it as a "dangerous experiment." The public money would be rendered insecure in the hands of customs officers and postmasters who were not equipped for the safe-keeping of money.<sup>17</sup> Finally, unlike Calhoun, Preston did not believe the government could make inconvertible paper circulate. In a letter to Henry Bowyer, Preston declared that if it were not for Calhoun's "adhesion" to the Independent Treasury, he "should pronounce the whole scheme of hard money and Sub-Treasury to be the most monstrous compound of fraud & folly ever attempted to be palmed off on a people."<sup>18</sup>

In his decision to remain in opposition to Van Buren, Preston was undoubtedly motivated by the conviction that in the long run the South had more to fear from "the rash and intrusive spirit" of Northern abolitionism, than from oppressive management of the

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<sup>17</sup>Preston's "Speech on the Sub-Treasury," Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 1st Sess., 87; Preston to Willie F. Mangum, Washington, D. C., October 4, 1837, Willie Person Mangum Papers.

<sup>18</sup>Preston to Henry Bowyer, Washington, D. C., January 11, 1838, Preston Family Papers, Library of Congress.

nation's fiscal affairs. While Calhoun felt that the Whig party would ultimately commit itself to abolitionism,<sup>19</sup> Preston, on the contrary, seems to have believed that the Whig party offered a stronger bulwark against the antislavery movement than did the Democratic party with its heavy infusion of radicals.<sup>20</sup>

To what extent Preston's decision to remain with the Whigs was the product of an objective analysis of the political situation must remain largely a matter of conjecture. Undeniably, however, the two senators entertained honest differences of opinion. Calhoun possessed a philosophical cast of mind; Preston's was a practical mind. Calhoun would risk the new theory, the "novel" measure; "experiment" to Preston was anathema. The politician must repair damaged institutions, he believed, not overturn them merely because they possessed flaws. Also, Preston's choice of the Whig camp was undeniably prompted in great measure by personal considerations, particularly by a desire for personal advancement. In some quarters his motives were suspect. Pierce M. Butler, for example, believed that while Preston was not a "bad person," and would do no "malignant act," yet "is notorious all his life--for sacrificing old friends for new allies--never does an act--political or personal--without a personal purpose."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 348.

<sup>20</sup>Preston to James T. Austin, Attorney General of Massachusetts, December 25, 1837, McClung Collection, Lawson McGhee Public Library, Knoxville, Tennessee.

<sup>21</sup>Quoted in Lander, "The Calhoun-Preston Feud, 1836-1842," loc. cit., 4.



Evidently, too, Preston believed that Calhoun's chances of becoming President were slender. To Mangum he confided:

He [Calhoun] considers Mr. Van Buren as actually defunct--altogether past resuscitation and that his party is without a head and under the necessity of having one-- It was supposed that Mr. C. could mount upon the vacant shoulders.<sup>22</sup>

This "calculation" Preston deemed "mistaken and fatal." Clay's political fortunes were improving, and with Preston's support the great Compromiser might be able to carry the South. Calhoun himself knew not how to account for Preston's actions, "unless indeed he has made up his mind to share the fate of Clay, and thinks that opposition to me is the most effectual mode to secure his favour."<sup>23</sup> Preston at least believed Clay's presidential chances rosier than Calhoun's, for he wrote, "Clay is the decided favourite of the Whigs. Many however speake [sic] of Harrison--not a few of Webster--and nobody thinks of Calhoun but Duff Green and himself."<sup>24</sup>

Preston's decision to part ways with Calhoun was at least as unequivocal as was the latter's to join Van Buren, and from the onset of the panic he espoused the National Bank. Moreover, during the special session he spoke and voted with the opposition, deciding early against the Sub-Treasury. To Beverly Tucker he wrote, "He [Calhoun] goes for the aurores [sic] and hard metal, and must, therefore, of necessity define or be of the administration. I fear that he and I

<sup>22</sup>Preston to Mangum, Washington, D. C., October 4, 1837, Willie Person Mangum Papers.

<sup>23</sup>"Calhoun Correspondence," loc. cit., 389.

<sup>24</sup>Preston to Bowyer, Washington, D. C., December 25, [1837], Preston Family Papers.

will hardly vote together this session."<sup>25</sup> The special session was almost two weeks old when Silas Wright, Van Buren's financial spokesman, introduced the necessary bills to legalize and control the Independent Treasury. The last of the six bills presented was the core of Van Buren's new financial program--the bill to separate the Treasury from the banking system. It provided that "all receivers of public money," the Treasurer, customs collectors, surveyors, and postmasters, be required to retain in their keeping all public funds "till the same is ordered by the proper department to be transferred or paid out."<sup>26</sup> A slow-moving but acrimonious debate ensued, during the course of which the conservative Democrats emerged as a distinct faction under the leadership of Rives. On September 19, Rives offered an amendment "as a substitute for the whole bill (authorizing the reception of the bills of all specie-paying banks not issuing notes of less than \$20.00)."<sup>27</sup> The Whigs now had their choice of two Democratic measures.

From the outset of the special session debates, Preston sought to carry South Carolina on the Sub-Treasury issue; initially, he seemed certain of success. Arrayed under his banner were some of the most influential South Carolina politicians: James Hamilton, Jr., James L. Petigru, Langdon Cheves, Robert Y. Hayne, and George McDuffie.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Preston to Beverly Tucker, Washington, D. C., September 15, 1837, in Lyon G. Tyler, The Letters and Times of the Tylers, 2 vols. (Richmond, 1884), I, 606.

<sup>26</sup>Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 1st Sess., 27.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>28</sup>Jervey, Robert Y. Hayne and His Times, 432, 446; Wiltse,

In the House, moreover, Preston's position was supported by all of the South Carolina delegation save Rhett and Pickens.<sup>29</sup> The contest for political ascendancy was soon to extend beyond the walls of Congress, however, and to develop into a bitter fight for the political support of South Carolina.

Meanwhile, Calhoun proceeded cautiously in his new role. If the administration desired a complete divorce of bank and state, then the Wright measure must be amended to preclude the possibility of a resumption of specie payments by the banks. Accordingly, he devised a "specie clause" providing for "annual reductions of one-fourth in the proportions of notes of specie-paying banks which might be accepted, so that after January 1, 1841, 'nothing but the legal currency of the United States . . . should be received for dues.'<sup>30</sup> Calhoun's amendment was carried by a vote of 24 to 23 on October 3.<sup>31</sup>

The Whigs, now in a minority in the Senate, took the position that they would propose no substitute measure. A third proposal, the Whig leaders reasoned, could have little success, and until one or the other of the Democratic measures was rejected, the advancement of an

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John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 348, 359; McDuffie to Calhoun, Cheery Hill, S. C., October 29, 1837, in Chauncey S. Boucher, and Robert P. Brooks (eds.), "Correspondence Addressed to John C. Calhoun, 1837-1849," Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1929 (Washington, 1930), 158. McDuffie wrote Calhoun that he disagreed with him on the expediency of "overthrowing" the banks, and advised: "I cannot change . . . my position, and I should deplore any attempt to make an organization of political parties on this question. . . ."

<sup>29</sup>Meigs, Life of John C. Calhoun, II, 197.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 195.

<sup>31</sup>Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 1st Sess., 96.

opposition proposal would be useless. On the other hand, the Whigs would be forearmed by having formulated a plan of their own to be urged at the proper moment. Meanwhile, they would throw their united energy into an unremitting assault on the Van Buren measures.

Finally, on September 29, following a three-hour speech by Buchanan in support of the Sub-Treasury plan, Preston came forward in opposition to the bill in a speech which was to be the most crucial one of his political career.<sup>32</sup> Fully committed now to the Whigs, Preston stood at the crossroads of his senatorial career. He was now to take the floor in opposition to Calhoun's views. Thus, he must establish justification for his separation from Calhoun. Moreover, the initial trial of strength between the two senators for control of the state was to be made upon the Sub-Treasury issue, and it would be to the advantage of the Whigs if Preston should succeed in carrying South Carolina. These were objectives which Preston hoped to achieve in his "Speech on the Sub-Treasury."

Moreover, the substitute measure, prepared by the opposition for presentation at the opportune time, needed a clear and cogent presentation in advance. Preston was the choice of the Whig leaders for the task. Thus, further importance attached to his utterances on this occasion.

Beginning his speech on September 29, Preston did not complete it until the following day. On the first day he spoke "about an hour"; on the second day, "about three hours." This speech, approximately

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<sup>32</sup>For text of the speech, see Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 1st Sess., 85-88.

four hours in length, was the longest of his senatorial addresses.

In his brief exordium he framed in simple, specific terms, the exact nature of the two Democratic proposals. He then told his auditors that the opposition did not plan to propose the creation of a national bank. Thus, all denunciations of the United States Bank had been "entirely gratuitous and irrelevant."

Preston now moved directly to his subject. The speech proper consisted of four major divisions: (1) a general assault on the administration; (2) an analysis of the causes of the nation's distress; (3) the weaknesses of Van Buren's Sub-Treasury scheme; and, (4) an explanation of the Whigs' proposal. To this basic organizational plan, Preston adhered fairly closely, interweaving refutation of key administration arguments.

Beginning his searing indictment of the administration, Preston declared, "I am wearied and disgusted with the eternal iteration of unmeaning clamor about the United States Bank." It was the "raw head-and-bloody-bones" used by the administration to "scare down the rising complaints of the people." Moreover, the late administration had received "honor and glory for having slain the monster"; "yet honorable senators roar him around this hall to split the ears of the groundlings." Dropping invective suddenly, Preston focused upon what he deemed a fallacious conclusion of Calhoun and Buchanan. Denunciations of the Bank of the United States had become "generalized into denunciations of all banks, and of the whole banking system. It is now said that the whole system is wrong and vicious. . . ." What followed was an elaborate encomium on the banking system. It was Preston's opinion,

in a word, that the system had been one of the mainsprings of civilization for the past 150 years. Clinching his contention with rhetorical questions and sensory diction, the Carolinian asked:

Shall we go back to hard money bank despotism, abolish banks and the Constitution, because we are smarting under temporary evils, produced by the mal-administration of both? Denounce the breeze that wafts your commerce through the world because it may be lashed into a tempest? Deprecate the showers which fructify your fields, because they may descend in torrents?

To Preston, the aim of the administration was clear. The "remedy" proposed by Buchanan was simply to cast the banks back, "polluted and dishonored" to the states and the people, since they were no longer "good enough for the chaste embraces of this most pure administration."

Preston proceeded next to expose the inconsistent course which the administration party had followed on the bank issue. It had lauded the experiment of the state banks under Jackson. Then, it had turned "short around" and proclaimed that the state banks are "unfit to be used as financial agents"; and, that the people "must undergo another experiment." After exposing the erratic course of the administration party, Preston sought next to demonstrate the constancy of the Whig course.

For some years past, sir, I and my friends have been denounced as United States Bank advocates and anti-States rights men, because we will not attribute all honor and glory to the State banks; and now again, we are denounced as United States Bank advocates and anti-States rights men, because we will not attribute all sin and infamy to the State banks. . . .

Preston turned next to the second division of his speech--the causes of the nation's distress. The discussion which followed was, in assance, a refutation of Buchanan's argument that the financial



distress of the country was to be attributed solely to the overaction of the banking system. Certainly they had contributed to the distress, but they were hardly the sole cause. Taking up the common objection that the experiment of the state banks had failed utterly, Preston defended unblushingly the Jackson measure he had formerly opposed. The "experiment" had failed, Preston averred, not because of any inherent weakness of the plan, but because of administration blunders in the management of the scheme. Various executive acts had (1) removed the restraint upon overbanking, and (2) given to the states "unrestrained licence" to "create a redundant banking capital."

Preston then proceeded to examine the weaknesses of the Independent Treasury proposal. The idea of establishing a "pure specie currency" was "chimerical." In the first place, specie would prove a "very expensive medium of circulation," because of the vast consumption of the precious metals in manufacturing, and the "diminished production of the mines." Second, specie would be "by no means so convenient as paper." Preston reasoned now from cause-to-effect as he demonstrated how the Sub-Treasury would bind down the nation's prosperity.

1st. you confer upon specie a use which does not appertain to the note of a specie-paying bank, convertible into specie: thus specie is made better than the best note, and a run is created upon the banks to the extent of the difference. 2nd. The Government dues are almost a million and a half a month; the demand for this much specie must necessarily threaten the banks with a disastrous run upon them. . . . 3rd. The prospects of such a state of things will make it necessary for the banks to press their debtors . . . and thus the two great creditors of the country, the Government and the banks, will be pressing the people at the same time.

The policy was absurd, Preston concluded. His eyes flashing, the

Carolina orator cried, "It is a pretence; a matter of cant and elation-  
eer upon; in short, sir, a humbug." He had noted that no senator had  
been able to get through a speech "without a suggestion of paper money  
of some kind or other." The administration, it appeared, was to have  
a banking system. Where was the divorce of bank and state?

While Preston held that a paper circulating medium was a  
necessity, he maintained, on the other hand, that it must not be  
government paper. Two cogent reasons sustained his view. First, "all  
history" could not furnish an example of a sound currency made by  
government paper. Moreover, any government which possessed the power  
to create its own paper would abuse that power.

Without the use of transitional device, Preston leaped suddenly  
into an artfully conceived justification of his break with Calhoun.  
His method was, first, to assert the superiority of his own political  
philosophy over that of the senior senator's. With an eye upon his  
remote audience, he averred:

I tremble, Mr. President, when I hear my colleague say,  
"We have reached a new era with regard to these insti-  
tutions [the banks]. He who would judge of the future  
by the past, in reference to them, will be wholly mistaken."  
I should be deeply grieved to think so. I should lament  
to believe that we are so adrift upon an unknown ocean,  
with an unknown heaven above us, that the light of the  
polar star can no longer reach us, and that our only hope  
of safe navigation . . . is, either in trusting blindly  
to the pilots who have brought us where we are, or in  
following the meteor coruscations of genius, which, too  
often dazzle, rather than guide.

Pursuing the extended figure, Preston continued the artful justifi-  
cation of his course.

For myself, sir, I will continue to . . . steer my course  
by, the steady light of experience. . . . If I could shut  
my eyes against this light; if I could forego the solemn

warnings of experience yet ringing in my ears, in favor of the revelations of genius, I should go nowhere for them with so much confidence as to my colleague.

Preston sought next to enhance his ethos by a subtle reaffirmation of his attachment to state rights principles as he also drove home his argument.

As guardians of the rights of the States, as jealous asserters of the limited character of this Government, as advocates and lovers of free institutions, would we give this tremendous power [To create paper money] to the Government? No sir!

The present administration, Preston declared, was not to be trusted with such power. From this contention, it was an easy step to the Whig orator's second major reason for remaining with the opposition. Preston declared forthrightly that, unlike Calhoun, he could place little confidence in the "wisdom, moderation, and patriotism" of the Van Buren administration. To sustain his position, he presented a graphic recital of the wrongs which the Jacksonian party had perpetrated against the nation in general, and against South Carolina in particular. Gesturing energetically, and raising the volume of his voice, Preston fixed his eyes upon the Jackson men, declaring:

I see nothing in the proposed measures to quiet my long established terrors of Executive power. I see before me the same men whom I have been all along warring upon--those men who have subverted the Constitution, and usurped all powers--those men who issued the proclamation against South Carolina, who passed the bloody bill, who seized the deposits, who expunged the records of the Senate, who have perpetrated their control, by using the patronage of the Government and the plundered money of the country, in the hands of one president to make his successor. . . . I cannot give them my confidence.

Continuing his refutation of Calhoun's arguments, Preston next attacked his colleague's contention that "the Government has the power

to make an inconvertible paper money circulate." His method was to cite examples to show that the government could not make its own notes "circulate at par." The convertibility of a note makes it good, he argued, whether endorsed by the government or not. Since, then, "convertibility makes currency," Calhoun had argued from a false generalization.

Preston sought next to prepare the way for the presentation of his own plan. His method was (1) to argue the wisdom of repairing existing institutions rather than discarding them, and (2) to delineate the evils inherent in Van Buren's Independent Treasury plan. In the process of sustaining his "repairs" case, he also sought further to establish a solid ethical justification for his opposition to Calhoun. He believed that damaged institutions should be repaired; that one should build upon what is available to build upon. "Let us not, with a fantastic caprice," he pleaded, "tear down the solid . . . fabric of our prosperity, that we may try, by as futile a device as the lamp of Aladdin, to build up another in one night, of fairy marble, and gold, and gems." The philosopher, he averred, might indulge in academic speculation upon "what is best," but the practical politician must "control, not create." Underscoring now his own constancy and sobriety, the Whig speaker declared:

In 1834, Mr. President, I entertained the same sentiments. I found all the great interests of the country implicated so thoroughly with the bank system, that to tear them apart at once would destroy everything, and therefore, I acquiesced in the proposal of my distinguished colleague for the purpose of making a cautious experiment. . . .

Preston thus proceeded to a delineation of the evils of the Sub-Treasury. He contended (1) that the Independent Treasury would

be an unsafe depository for public funds since the collectors would be subject to "the arts of solicitation," and the public funds would be in danger of the hazards of fire and theft; and (2) that the cost of keeping the public funds in many widely scattered offices would be prohibitive. The state banks, on the other hand, Preston argued, were not subject to these weaknesses.

After having thus built a secure foundation of reasoning in favor of state banks, Preston advanced the conservative Whig proposal. He declared:

But there is an obvious mode of securing all the advantages I have attributed to the custody of the revenue by the banks, and of avoiding all the evils which are said to be apprehended. This mode, sir, is to make special deposits in the State banks. By special deposits is understood to be that deposit which the bank received to keep; and not to use for banking purposes; and to return the identical thing to the depositor when drawn for. For this species of custody, from which the bank derives no benefit, some small recompense might be demanded, and given, not amounting to an assignable fraction of the cost of the Sub-Treasury.

Following his explanation of the Whig plan, Preston declared that he would move an amendment to the Sub-Treasury bill, "providing for the special deposits of the money in the State banks."

One task yet remained. Preston wished to strike a telling blow at Van Buren's plan; by visualizing it in operation, he could expose clearly the consequences that would result. Hence, by the use of hypothetical illustrations he showed how the system as a whole would fail. Finally, he demonstrated by historical example that the Sub-Treasury would possess the same weakness that the banking system "suffered in its infancy."



As Preston entered upon his short peroration, he returned again to the basic assumption from which he had argued throughout: the government must adapt itself to the circumstances of the present. "We should reform our system, not crush it; we should deal with the circumstances around us, not attempt a new creation." After pleading for the restoration of the confidence of the people, Preston concluded with an appeal for acceptance of the "special deposit" plan which, he claimed, would restore "national confidence."

Among the numerous recorded impressions of Preston's elaborate defense of the state banks and justification of his decision to remain with the Whigs, was that written by John Quincy Adams on November 23, 1837.

I consumed much of the morning in reading Mr. Preston's speech . . . on the . . . Divorce of Bank and State, bill-- a strong, solid, argumentative speech; brilliant with imagery, and not overcharged with ornament, scrupulously respectful to his colleague . . . , and yet exposing in clear light his Phaestontic [Sic] course.

The "radical weakness of the speech," declared Adams, was "a capillary tube of nullification, scarcely perceptible" running through it, and "imparting poison to all the wholesome waters of the stream." Thus, the speech was wanting in "moral principle"--the "foundation of all wisdom."<sup>33</sup> The Washington correspondents of the Mercury and the Southern Patriot<sup>34</sup> were agreed, however, that the speech was a masterful effort. Particularly revealing are the Mercury's comments:

<sup>33</sup>Adams (ed.), Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, IX, 433.

<sup>34</sup>Columbia Southern Patriot, quoted in Charleston Mercury, October 4, 1837.



Mr. Preston made a brilliant and truth telling speech. . . . For three hours he fastened the attention of friend and foe. . . . For truth, correct reasoning, eloquence and biting sarcasm, this speech . . . was pre-eminently distinguished. I had reposed great confidence in Mr. Calhoun's abilities, but I honestly think Mr. Preston is not a whit behind his colleague, and I am sure every body thought so today.<sup>35</sup>

The Whig leaders were doubtless pleased with Preston's skillful analysis of the perplexing question of handling the government's funds and with his effective presentation of their plan. Preston's "Speech on the Sub-Treasury" was undeniably one of his ablest deliberative addresses. His use of proofs, language, and ordering of materials reveal a keen sense of discrimination, a sensitivity to the urgency of the problem, as well as his own ticklish personal situation. In a style less elegant than was customary with him, Preston argued with sufficient rigor to establish a high degree of probability that the adoption of the Sub-Treasury system would prove an inexpedient and undesirable course of action. His argumentative development reveals not only careful constructive reasoning but also competence in adapting himself to the arguments of his opponents. He selected significant points of clash which served the dual function of enforcing his central theme and of justifying his own political course. Emotional proof was used sparingly, but effectively, in energizing his key ideas, particularly his contention that the Van Buren party was not to be trusted with the power which the Sub-Treasury scheme would confer upon it. Also, Preston made conscious and skillful use of ethical proof in his forthright, but courteous, refutation of Calhoun's

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<sup>35</sup>Charleston Mercury, October 5, 1837.

arguments, and in the assertion of his intelligence, his sobriety, and his constancy. The craftsmanship of his speech, however, reveals certain weaknesses. While the central theme of the written speech emerges clearly, it is doubtful if the progression of his ideas was immediately intelligible to his hearers. In other words, the relationship of the parts of the argument to the structural whole were not expressed with the clarity demanded by oral discourse. Militating also against the clarity of his argumentative development was his practice of returning to a point developed earlier without supplying adequate semantic clues to the relevance of the contention in its new context.

That the Senate failed to endorse the Whig proposal as set forth by Preston is hardly to be considered an indictment against Preston's rhetorical ability. His voice was but one of the minority. The combined efforts of Clay, Webster, Preston, and other Whigs who spoke in opposition to the Sub-Treasury scheme were not sufficient to sever the ties of party. Undeniably, Preston himself was strongly actuated by partisanship and a desire for personal advancement.

Since the Whig plan of reforming the state bank system did not achieve functional existence, its soundness, and, hence, the integrity of Preston's case for it, cannot be tested by an appeal to history. On the other hand, it is possible to gauge the integrity of Preston's arguments against the Sub-Treasury with some degree of accuracy by an appeal to the course of events subsequent to the delivery of his speech. In Schlesinger's opinion:

The plan was certainly vulnerable on economic grounds.

It enforced a decentralization of the banking system which in the end would prove so cumbersome that the policy was reversed by the Federal Reserve system. Indeed, the economic objections were barely mentioned. . . . Instead, the independent treasury was denounced for political and social reasons--as a movement toward despotism, and a conspiracy against private property.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, Preston, like many other opponents of Van Buren's plan, failed to envision the crucial weakness of the proposal which the ebb and flow of events would disclose.

The special session of 1837 failed to enact Van Buren's measure. On October 2, Calhoun's "specie clause" was adopted by a vote of 24 to 23, and Rives' substitute motion was "tried and lost" by a vote of 26 to 22. The Whig measure, offered by Preston, also failed by a vote of 26 to 22.<sup>37</sup> During the regular session of Congress, which convened in December, 1837, the Sub-Treasury bill passed the Senate, but on June 25 it was rejected in the House by a majority of 14.<sup>38</sup> It was the fate of the bill to meet with successive defeats until July, 1840, when it passed the House "after long and bitter debate, only by the small majority of 17 in a total vote of 231."<sup>39</sup> Throughout the period from 1837 to 1840, however, the Sub-Treasury "existed in fact" even though there was no law to support it.<sup>40</sup>

The political struggle between Calhoun and Preston, begun when

<sup>36</sup>Schlesinger, The Age of Jackson, 239.

<sup>37</sup>Niles' National Register, LIII (October 7, 1837), 88-89.

<sup>38</sup>Meigs, Life of John C. Calhoun, II, 202.

<sup>39</sup>Kinley, "The Independent Treasury of the United States," loc. cit., 40-41.

<sup>40</sup>Edward M. Shepard, Martin Van Buren (Boston, 1899), 346.

the majority of the South Carolina delegation in the House followed Preston's lead in opposition to the Sub-Treasury, was slow in taking form on the local level. Neither of the men was disposed to press the Sub-Treasury disagreement into a full-scale political contest. In their floor clashes, while each had been candid in expressing his position, each had kept his dignity and displayed a respectful attitude toward the other. As the debates neared an end, Preston confided to Mangum: "It grieves me much to see him [Calhoun] separated from his associates and to be compelled to stand in the attitude towards him which is enforced on me. I rejoice however that we have passed through the discussion without personal collision. . . ." <sup>41</sup> Three days before, Calhoun had written to his daughter, "I regret that my colleague has not thought fit to go with me. I think both he and Gn [Waddy] Thompson have acted badly, but I leave it to them and their constituents." <sup>42</sup>

The newspapers of the state were likewise not at first inclined to hoist the black flag. While for a time Calhoun's position was sustained only by the influential Mercury, edited by Robert Barnwell Rhett's brother-in-law, J. A. Stuart, and by the Pendleton Messenger, the editors of the state as a whole tried to restore harmony between the two senators, either by remaining non-committal or by confining their comment to the policy aspect of the rift. Early in October, however, Calhoun's Washington organ, the Reformer, edited by Richard K. Cralle,

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<sup>41</sup>Preston to Mangum, Washington, D. C., October 3, 1837, Willie P. Mangum Papers.

<sup>42</sup>"Calhoun Correspondence," loc. cit., 380.

touched off the state newspaper polemics by a severe castigation of Preston.<sup>43</sup> The Mercury expressed "regret" that the Reformer had assailed Preston, declaring:

We doubt not that he [Preston] has acted from the purest motives, and it will never do to denounce a State rights man of such proved worth . . . because he happens to differ with us on the complex and difficult question of the currency.<sup>44</sup>

But the hot-blooded editor of the Columbia Telescope, A. S. Johnston, a relative of Preston,<sup>45</sup> could not brook the Reformer's attack, and retorted in a severe denunciation of Calhoun's course, declaring that the "hard money scheme, if carried out . . . would be fraught with infinite mischief."<sup>46</sup> The Mercury struck back, but still the leading editorial combatants were disposed to accommodate their differences in an effort to restore harmony. The Charleston Courier, while supporting Preston, remained relatively quiet and conciliatory in tone.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, in an effort to gain support for Webster in the South, "the Boston editors" sought to "Websterize" Preston and to create the impression that the Calhoun-Preston split was "a serious hostility." The Boston Courier published a letter from its Washington correspondent arraying "the alleged boasts of Mr. Preston's supporters on one side, and of Mr. Calhoun's supporters on the other, as to the

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 383-384; Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 359.

<sup>44</sup>Charleston Mercury, October 11, 1837.

<sup>45</sup>Lander, "The Preston-Calhoun Feud, 1836-1842," loc. cit., 6.

<sup>46</sup>Quoted in Charleston Mercury, October 11, 1837.

<sup>47</sup>See Charleston Courier, October 8, 10, 1837.

power they can respectively bring into the field in the projected warfare." The letter also referred to "Mr. Preston's changing his seat in the Senate from Mr. Calhoun's vicinity, as a pregnant omen of hostility," and suggested that "Mr. P. returned home before adjournment, to be early in the field [against Calhoun]." The Mercury retorted that the letter was a "tissue of falsehood"; that Preston's change of seat "had nothing to do with Mr. Calhoun and the financial question at issue"; and, that Preston had hastened home "to discharge a professional duty . . . in a capital trial in which he was counsel."

The Mercury went on to advise:

The wish, we know of both Mr. Calhoun and Mr. Preston, is to forbear to urge the present mere difference of opinion on a financial question, to a total estrangement. Let their friends not imprudently press what all would avoid, and all will be well.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time, the Columbia Southern Times, a Preston supporter, noticed the "spirit of recrimination" in "the ultra partisan presses through the country," and affirmed that "a difference on a single point of expedience, can never generate bitter party feelings among their [Preston's and Calhoun's] enlightened friends in this state: where both are thoroughly known and estimated."<sup>49</sup> However, the "Boston prints," by presenting a common foe to the local newspaper partisans, served further to calm the state presses.

As the newspaper war subsided in mid-November, however, the political fight increased in tempo. Preston evidently did not choose

<sup>48</sup>Charleston Mercury, October 24, November 10, 1837.

<sup>49</sup>Columbia Southern Times, quoted, ibid., October 24, 1837.



to collide openly with Calhoun. Calhoun, on the other hand, despite the Mercury's avowal of his desire to "forbear," chose to join the issue immediately. Knowing that he faced revolt in South Carolina, he carried out a series of shrewdly calculated political moves to insure a resounding victory over Preston at home, despite McDuffie's game-cock notice that he would "deplore any attempt to make an organization of political parties" on the Sub-Treasury question.<sup>50</sup> He first prepared his newspaper defenses, asking Duff Green to have Cralle "come out in a temperate article denying that the Reformer has gone an inch beyond the defensive, and stating at the same time that he fully understands the real object of the Telescope, and his determination not to afford it the pretext [E] for its insidies [sic] and indirect attack on me through the Reformer." Also, Calhoun advised Green, former editor of the Telegraph, to resign his place on the editorial staff of the Reformer, because of Green's "supposed enmity to Preston." Thus, the Telescope could not attack Calhoun "through the sides" of the Reformer.<sup>51</sup> Also, Calhoun "prepared his lieutenants" for the struggle before he left Washington, and sounded "publick sentiment" on his way home.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, in a letter to his constituents, published in the Edgefield Advertiser, he gave a convincing defense of his political course, arguing that there had never been "so fair

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<sup>50</sup>"Correspondence Addressed to John C. Calhoun, 1837-1849," loc. cit., 158; Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 359.

<sup>51</sup>"Calhoun Correspondence," loc. cit., 383.

<sup>52</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 359.

an opportunity" to "reap the fruits" of the long state rights struggle.<sup>53</sup>

Calhoun's lieutenants proved more efficient than their commander had expected them to be. Particularly helpful to Calhoun in the battle which ensued in the November meeting of the legislature, was the powerful Rhett-Elmore "clique," a combination directed by Robert Rhett in Congress, and Franklin H. Elmore, congressman from 1836 to 1838, and president of the Bank of the State of South Carolina. Rhett and Elmore were represented in the legislature by their brothers, Albert and James Rhett and B. T. Elmore.<sup>54</sup> A set of three resolutions was offered in the legislature declaring it "expedient" to divorce the government's financial operation from the state banks. Albert Rhett, Menniger, and Davie led the fight for the divorce of bank and state, while Pettigru, Yeadon, and Hamilton, stood in opposition.<sup>55</sup> Calhoun believed he would be sustained by a majority of "3 or 4 to 1," but the Rhett resolutions passed by a "majority of better than ten to one."<sup>56</sup> Moreover, a series of resolutions declaring against the Sub-Treasury, offered by Hamilton in the Senate, was tabled by a vote of 37 to 3.<sup>57</sup>

Meigs points out that "the only somewhat gloved hand that the

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.; Edgefield Advertiser, quoted in Niles' National Register, LIII (December 2, 1837), 217-218.

<sup>54</sup>Kibler, Benjamin F. Perry, 217-218.

<sup>55</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 1, 1837.

<sup>56</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 361.

<sup>57</sup>Meigs, Life of John C. Calhoun, II, 200.

mangled Preston felt in this instance," was in a fourth resolution offered by Robert Rhett, declaring that it was not intended by the original resolutions "to imply any manner of censure upon other public servants of the State, who may have declared opinions to the contrary."<sup>58</sup> The Anti-Sub-Treasury men were completely defeated, and Petigru wrote at the conclusion of the three-week struggle: "Everything has gone for the new scheme which Mr. Calhoun patronizes. I say everything, but not everybody; for Preston, Hamilton, Hayne, Legare and I are somebody, I think. . . ."<sup>59</sup>

Calhoun was consummating his scheme for uniting the state, and then the South, into a party for the protection and perpetuation of slavery. That his victory on the Sub-Treasury would serve as a unifying force he had no doubt, for on December 24 he wrote to Anna Calhoun, "The action of our state on the Divorce has made a deep impression out of the state, and will do much to rally the South on our position."<sup>60</sup> Preston either could not or would not view Calhoun's defection to Van Burenism as a high-principled move. The "Edgefield Letter," he believed, was proof that Calhoun's course "was decided, by the fact that he hated and feared Clay more than Van Buren. . . ."<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Preston failed to understand how Calhoun could unceremoniously desert so many men who had been his staunch supporters and had

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Quoted in Jervey, Robert Y. Hayne and His Times, 446.

<sup>60</sup>"Calhoun Correspondence," loc. cit., 387.

<sup>61</sup>Preston to John Tyler, Washington, D. C., December 30, 1837, in Tyler, The Letters and Times of the Tylers, I, 586.

contributed in no small degree to the tremendous power that he wielded.

To John Tyler, he confided his feelings shortly after the new

Congress convened:

The course of my colleague has been disastrous to his friends, and his own position is most mournful. He has carried our State against Hayne, Hamilton, McDuffie, Cheves--in short, against every man whose name has been heard of out of it. This is, of course, the commencement of a long and ardent struggle, in which Mr. C. will see in opposing ranks the familiar faces of those gallant gentlemen who for ten years past have fought under his banner, while he now surrounds himself by supporters of the bloody bill, by the expungers, by all that faithless and atrocious crew of whose treachery he was the most conspicuous victim, and whose ferocity has been glutted upon his friends.<sup>62</sup>

As the Congressional session opened, however, Preston was evidently not convinced that Calhoun had decided to join with the "expungers." Preston arrived in Washington early, but did not take his seat immediately. When Calhoun reached the city, Preston called on him, evidently for the purpose of finding out what course Calhoun planned to pursue. Calhoun, who had resolved to treat Preston "with the utmost courtesy," received his colleague "kindly." But Preston apparently did not call again, and was clearly committed to the Whigs soon after he took his seat. Calhoun wrote on January 24 that Preston was "totally alienated."<sup>63</sup>

Such was the nature of the issues and the political alignments of the regular session that the two senators could hardly avoid collisions which served only to hasten complete estrangement. The first brush came unexpectedly as a result of a sudden resumption of

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.; "Calhoun Correspondence," loc. cit., 399.

the abolition question, which, significantly, illustrates the basic dissimilarity in the thinking of the two men. It also supplied the issue which occasioned Preston's only notable rhetorical effort of the session.

The antislavery crusade, so feared by Preston, continued to gain strength following the 1836 debates in Congress over the reception of abolition petitions. Throughout 1837, antislavery societies increased, as did abolitionist presses. From their very enemies the abolitionists drew succor. The gag rule of the House enkindled the crusading zeal of the antislaveryites. Also, the Texas question added to their political strength, for it was this issue that enabled John Quincy Adams to project his agitating notion that the South was seeking to secure the fertile stretches beyond the Sabine River for the purpose of extending her slave empire. The movement entered a critical stage on November 7, 1837, when Elijah P. Lovejoy, a crusading abolitionist editor was killed in Alton, Illinois, while defending his press against a mob attack.<sup>64</sup> This incident served to bring the slavery issue back into prominence in the halls of Congress.

On December 19, Benjamin Swift of Vermont, presented in the Senate a series of resolutions from the Vermont legislature protesting against the annexation of Texas, and affirming the power of Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia and to outlaw interstate

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<sup>64</sup>William E. Dodd, Expansion and Conflict (Boston, 1915), 166; Samuel Flagg Bemis, John Quincy Adams and the Union (New York, 1956), 361-363.

slave trade.<sup>65</sup> To meet this sudden, serious assault on slavery, Calhoun prepared a set of six resolutions in which he once more expounded his "compact" theory of the Constitution, and defined the obligations imposed by the Constitution with regard to slavery. His resolutions, calculated to force Northern Democrats "to take an advanced position with respect to Southern claims," urged that the states, when entering the Union, had retained sole power over their own domestic institutions, including slavery, and that "any intermeddling of any one or more states or a combination of their citizens, with the domestic institutions . . . is an assumption of superiority not warranted by the Constitution. . . ." Additionally, Calhoun contended that it was the duty of the federal government to extend increased stability and security to the domestic institutions of the states of the Union, and that a demand for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia would be an assault upon the institutions of the slaveholding states. His sixth and final resolution asserted that a refusal to extend slave territory would violate the equality of the states and tend to destroy the Union.<sup>66</sup>

These aggressive resolutions, presented on December 27, 1837, touched off an animated debate which began on January 3 and closed on January 12. On the second day of debate, Preston and Calhoun collided in an acid-dripping exchange of several minutes. Calhoun's purpose in presenting these resolutions, he declared, was to "test" senatorial

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<sup>65</sup>Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 39-40.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 55; Sydnor, The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 244-245.



sentiment on the slavery issue. He hoped that they would prove a "common ground," upon which "all who were opposed to abolition might be rallied." Preston was on his feet instantly to reply. He favored his colleague's "abstract principles," which were, he thought, "of great importance." But experience had shown that "abstract principles were either trampled under foot, or argued away." Thus, to assert "mere creeds and abstractions for the protection of Southern rights," was "labor lost." Preston believed that the proper solution was "united action" on the part of "Southern gentlemen," and he was "contemplating" a "measure" behind which the South could "move in one solid phalanx." After a biting exchange on the importance of "abstract principles," Calhoun reminded Preston that the resolutions were not proposed as "a cure," but "as a test." Preston then closed the bitter colloquy, declaring that he believed Calhoun's resolutions were not strong enough, since they "left open the question of reception" of abolition petitions.<sup>67</sup>

The following day, Preston was ready with his own measure--a resolution calling for the annexation of Texas. Preston prefaced his resolution with a preamble which declared that the "true boundary of the United States, under the treaty of Louisiana, extended on the southwest to the Rio Grande del Norte, which river continued to be the boundary line until the territory west of the Sabine was surrendered to Spain by the treaty of 1819." "Many weighty considerations of policy," he further declared, "made it expedient to re-establish the said true boundary," and to "re-annex" the Texas territory to the

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<sup>67</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, January 5, 1838.

Union, "with the consent of the said State." Therefore, the resolution declared, it was "desirable and expedient to re-annex" Texas.<sup>68</sup> On Preston's motion, Calhoun's sixth resolution was tabled on January 12, since the same ground was covered by his own pending resolution to re-annex Texas.<sup>69</sup>

In the meantime, the remainder of Calhoun's state rights resolutions passed the Senate with slight modifications.<sup>70</sup> While Preston voted for all except the sixth resolution, which lost by a vote of 35 to 9, he believed that the annexation of Texas afforded the most direct, the simplest, and the surest method of preserving the sectional equilibrium between the North and the South. Since Texas could be divided into a number of smaller states, the South's equality in the Senate would be maintained. Such a step, moreover, would enable the South to overcome the disadvantage thrown upon it because of the increasing numbers from the North in the House.

The question, however, was a dangerous one, since it involved the right of the South to extend her slave system. It was a question which "the leaders of both parties endeavored to suppress . . . lest the political organizations to which their fortunes were tied be split into Northern and Southern wings."<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, Preston wished to

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<sup>68</sup>Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 76.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 98. Mrs. Preston believed that Calhoun's sixth resolution was an attempt on Calhoun's part to "take the lead" from her husband on the Texas question. She recorded: "My father writes that it is Mr. Calhoun's wont to take the lead from others in this leap frog fashion, & that Mr. Preston just did the proper thing, not to permit Mr. Calhoun to take it on this occasion." Diary of Mrs. Penelope Preston, 17-18.

<sup>70</sup>Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 74, 80-81, 96-97, 98.

<sup>71</sup>Sydnor, The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 321.

try the issue at once. Just as he had championed Texas recognition, he now became the senatorial leader for annexation.

During the final months of Jackson's administration, both houses of Congress had voted to recognize Texas as an independent power, and to authorize the appointment of a minister to Texas. On August 4, 1837, the Texan Minister, Memucan Hunt, submitted to Forsyth, the American Secretary of State, a formal proposal for annexation. The proposal was rejected, however, on the grounds that acceptance would violate the treaty of amity between the United States and Mexico. Texas leaders continued, however, to exert pressure on the United States government during the final months of 1837. Also, petitions both favorable and unfavorable to annexation made their appearance in Congress during the early weeks of the regular session.<sup>72</sup> It was against this background of agitation that Preston proceeded to try the annexation issue.

Preston was not without support in the House, where his colleague, Waddy Thompson, also introduced an annexation resolution early in the session.<sup>73</sup> In the Senate, Preston found a warm supporter in Robert J. Walker of Mississippi, whose state legislature had already demanded immediate acquisition of Texas "in order that the slave states might secure 'an equipoise of influence in the halls of Congress. . . .'"<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Justin H. Smith, The Annexation of Texas (New York, 1911), 57-63; E. C. Barker, "Annexation of Texas," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, L (July, 1946), 51-55.

<sup>73</sup>Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 450.

<sup>74</sup>Sydnor, The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 322.

Aside from Walker, however, Preston found little support, even among Southern senators, who were loathe to endorse the risky measure. Clay, ambitious to become President, could hardly support Preston without incurring the loss of Northern support, and it was he, in fact, who managed to defer debate on Preston's resolution.<sup>75</sup>

When Preston's proposal finally became the order of the day on April 24, the whole burden of supporting it devolved upon him. Walker, who desired to speak in favor of the resolution, was indisposed,<sup>76</sup> and no other member came to Preston's assistance. Realizing that he faced a formidable opposition, Preston bestowed great care on the argumentative development and language of his two-hour address. He had not only to overcome a number of serious objections to his resolution, but, also, to convince the Senate that the acquisition of Texas should be effected, not by treaty (as was the usual mode of acquiring new territory), but by the concurrence of both branches of the Government and a "treaty tripartite" between the governments involved.

Preston sought, from his opening sentence, to place himself upon a common ground of agreement with his audience, and at the same time to allay fear by suggesting that Mexico no longer possessed the power to resubjugate Texas.<sup>77</sup> In calming language, he recounted the events which led to Texan independence, and declared that the government of the young republic had demonstrated its ability to function

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<sup>75</sup>Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 80.

<sup>76</sup>Niles' National Register, LVI (April 24, 1838), 137.

<sup>77</sup>For texts of the speech, see Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 555-559; Niles' National Register, LV (October 6, 1838), 92-95.

efficiently since the day of its birth. Then he went on to paint a graphic picture of civil serenity. "Profound peace has brooded over her [Texas'] fertile lands, making them pregnant; while all the benign influences of order and enlightened liberty have been experienced as in our own country."

Before proceeding to the partitioning of his address, Preston sought further to render his audience well disposed toward himself and toward his proposition. First, he declared the subject itself became a fit matter "for the deliberation of Congress" when Texas voted to join the Union. In the second place, the proposition could hardly offend Mexico since the terms of the resolution provided that Texas should be annexed only when it could be done "consistently with the public faith and treaty stipulations of the United States." Finally, the Van Buren administration was, in reality, favorable to the proposal. To soften administration resistance, the Carolina orator reminded his hearers that Van Buren had, as Secretary of State, "exerted all his abilities to accomplish this object." Moreover, Joel R. Poinsett, the Secretary of War, had been "sedulously engaged in the same enterprise under two Administrations." Finally, Forsyth, the Secretary of State, was a Georgian by birth, and "could not be suspected of entertaining different opinions." Continuing his effort to allay audience prejudices and fears, Preston sought also to reveal himself as a man of probity and good will. "I disavow, Mr. President, all hostile purposes, or even ill temper, towards Mexico; and I trust that I impugn neither the policy nor principles of the Administration."

Preston next moved directly to his theme, declaring, "I feel

myself at liberty to proceed to the discussion of the points made in the resolution, entirely unembarrassed of any preliminary obstacle. . . ."

The address proper falls into two major divisions. Preston divided his time fairly equally between constructive and refutative argument. He rested his constructive argument upon three major contentions, which were drawn from the preamble to his resolution: (1) The territory occupied by the Republic of Texas was at one time a part of the United States; (2) The "Constitutionality of its alienation is at least doubtful"; and, (3) its "reannexation" is both "desirable and expedient."

The heart of Preston's constructive case was the ingenious contention that since Texas was still, constitutionally, a part of the United States, her union with the other states would properly be "re-annexation" rather than annexation. To sustain this argument, Preston relied on a copious array of factual data. He demonstrated, first, that the extent of the French claim to Texas, established by La Salle's discovery of the Mississippi in 1613, determined the extent of the United States claim. In 1792 France had ceded Louisiana to Spain; in 1800 Spain had re-ceded it to France; in 1804 France, by the Treaty of Louisiana, had ceded it to the United States. His conclusion was that the United States "obtained title to whatever was conveyed to Spain by the treaty of 1762."

What, then, was the nature of this claim, the extent of which was determined solely by the French title? What were the boundaries, and how were they determined? The "true and just" western boundary, Preston showed clearly, was the Rio Grande which, from the time of



La Salle's discovery, had been recognized as the legitimate western boundary. In further support of his contention, Preston availed himself of an imposing array of non-artistic proofs drawn from the correspondence of John Quincy Adams with the Spanish Minister, Don Luis de Onís. As Secretary of State under Monroe, Adams contended with Onís that the western boundary of Louisiana extended to the Rio Grande. The Adams letter supplied Preston with twelve cogent items of authority, both historical and geographical. Driving his contention still further, Preston turned next to the testimony of American statesmen who, he held, had all unhesitatingly expressed their "conviction of the validity" of the United States claim, "down to the unfortunate treaty of 1819." To the testimony of Adams was to be added that of Monroe, Jefferson, Madison, Jackson, and Clay.

Preston also availed himself of a set of resolutions which Clay had offered in the House in 1819, previous to the ratification of the Treaty of Florida. Clay's testimony that the Territory of Florida was inadequate compensation for "that part of Louisiana lying west of the Sabine," served not only to round out Preston's first major argument, but also to clear the way for his next contention: that the alienation of the territory of the United States under the Florida treaty was of "evil precedent, and questionable constitutionally."

Taking up next his second major argument, Preston averred that the Constitution rests in Congress the power to "dispose of the territory or other property of the United States." The Treaty of Florida was thus a violation of the Constitution. The object of the clause was to effect cessions of territory made to the government by

certain states. This was its sole object. Dropping no threads in the weaving of his argument, he maintained that since the clause did not discriminate "between the power of this Government to dispose of territory within and without the limits of the States," the territories must be protected against any "wild power of alienation." The guarantees of "solemn contracts," he pointed out, furnished such protection. Wisconsin, for example, was protected by the "terms of session from Virginia"; Florida was protected by the "terms of session [sic] from Spain." Preston drove his contention home, characteristically, by rhetorical questions. "Will anyone . . . claim for Congress the power to dispose of either of these territories to a foreign power? Could the States of Louisiana, Arkansas, or Missouri be sold?"

Energizing his style, Preston drove his contention further; in the process he delivered a telling side-blow to the abolitionists, while at the same time appealing for Southern support for his measure.

If such a doctrine were countenanced for a moment, would any man south of the Potomac feel himself safe from sale or exchange, while the wild fanaticism of the Abolitionists is hurrying so large a portion of our fellow-citizens upon measures no less extravagant. . . .? Will that spirit which demands the exercise of political power for the confiscation of property, and sports itself upon the very brink of servile war--will that spirit pause in its reckless career, at so obvious a measure as the retrocession of southern territory?

Preston now iterated his rhetorical objective. He was resigned to what had been done, and he proposed no "wild and chimerical revolution" to rectify what he conceived to have been wrong originally. He did propose, however, that "we should seize the fair and just occasion now presented," to reestablish "the integrity of our dismembered territory," by "re-annexing" Texas. Before taking up his contention that "re-

annexation" would be desirable, Preston reminded his dubious hearers that a number of sagacious American statesmen had sought to effect what he now proposed.

Preston advanced to his third major contention, declaring that the reacquisition of Texas was well worth the efforts of these men, since "the country lost to us by the treaty of 1819 is one of the finest upon the whole earth." Preston then delineated the advantages which would accrue to both North and South by "reannexation." In an artistic encomium on Texas, he painted in graphic diction the geographical and climatic conditions of Texas which would produce mutual benefits for both sections.

Its fields will teem with the richest productions of the earth; its rivers will bear down to . . . our sea an unbounded produce, to enhance the navigation of the Northern States, while an increasing population augments the demand for their manufactures.

After recapitulating his major constructive arguments, Preston turned to a refutation of the leading objections which had been raised against his proposal. For a succinct exposition of the chief objections, Preston cited a committee report of the Massachusetts House of Representatives. The committee believed (1) that there was resident in no branch of the government, "or in all of them united," power to effect a union with the "sovereign state of Texas"; and (2) that such authority did not belong "to the government, however absolute, of any nation." "Both of these propositions I controvert," declared Preston. His method of refuting the first argument was to show that the opposition had fallen into an error in reasoning. Their "erroneous conclusion" resulted from a mistaken assumption of the

"nature and character of our government." Preston then propounded the state rights interpretation of the federal government. If his premise that the government was "a confederacy of sovereign states" were accepted, then his conclusion could scarcely be denied. To refute the second objection, Preston turned to documentary evidence. The Constitution, he averred, clearly stipulated that "new States may be admitted by the Congress into this Union." Moreover, the required summa ius populi had been exercised in the case of Texas: the citizens of Texas had voted overwhelmingly in favor of annexation. After thus overcoming the "formal difficulties," Preston proceeded to "those [Objections] which have exercised a more decisive influence over that portion of the Union which is offering a determined opposition to the measure."

Preston began his climactically structured refutation by laying bare the substance of the "cry" that had been raised against annexation in the Northern and Middle States.

Stripped of all circumlocution the proposition is this. We are hostile to the institutions of the South, and propose their destruction; we have a predominating power, daily increasing, over that section; and we do not intend that it shall put itself in a condition to resist our power, when we may choose to exercise it.

He spoke now of the "grave language of dignified men"; not of "wild and blind fanaticism."

Preston's diction became more concrete and sensory, his sentences shorter, as he defined the fundamental problem. Then, utilizing the "this-or-nothing" technique of persuasion, he declared that the South must now have a guarantee of safety for her social structure, and that his measure alone would provide such a guarantee.

Failing in this, the South would be duty bound, "by her own action to provide for her own safety."

Preston hurried to append to his veiled threat of secession an appeal to fair play and altruism. The position taken by some with "regard to the Southern portion of the Confederacy," was not only "insulting" to the feelings of Southerners, but was also "derogatory to the Constitutional rights of the South."

Preston then refuted the argument that "the growth of the South should be prevented for the purpose of preserving the original balance of the Constitution." First he examined the status quo.

At this moment the non-slaveholding States have in the House of Representatives 143 members out of 240, a majority of one-sixth; and a majority of four members in this body.

He then looked "forward to the next census" when the North's power would be increased in New York, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan. "Where, sir, will the South be then? Where the balance of the Constitution?" Preston continued his refutation by attempting to prove that territory west of the Sabine could not possibly "contain a population equal to that of the non-slaveholding states."

One further argument needed refuting. The opposition had charged that "slavery . . . and the number of slaves" would be increased by adding Texas. His counter argument was that since Northern law made "the introduction of slaves a felony," then any increase in the slave population of Texas could only be by "natural increase." Besides, the slaves transferred to Texas would be less crowded; would live in a more healthful climate; and, would, "from the enhanced value of their labor, enlist a more intense interest on the

part of their owners to attend to their wants. . . ."

Preston had finished his argument. In his peroration he first made a characteristically blighting attack on the abolitionists. Then he appealed for acceptance of his proposal. "I wish no power for the South but enough to protect herself," he affirmed. From appeal, Preston switched suddenly to demand. "We stand entirely on the defensive; we desire safety, not power, and we must have it." Preston next sought to motivate his proposition in a double appeal to self-interest and altruism.

Grant us this just and humble boon, by repairing the violated integrity of your territory, by augmenting your wealth and power, by extending the empire of law, liberty and Christianity.

Elevating his language, he closed on a lofty plane.

Give it to us, and you will accomplish that "which is the greatest interest of every true American, the consolidation of our Union, in which is involved our prosperity, felicity, safety--perhaps our national existence." Mr. President with these words of Washington I conclude.

The courtly Carolinian adjusted "the flowing drapery of his splendid cloak,"<sup>78</sup> and retired to his place. No sooner was he seated than Buchanan rushed over to him with unrestrained praise of his effort. "Mr. Preston," he exclaimed, "I always knew you could make the finest figures of speech of any body in this Senate, but I now see you can make the finest arguments."<sup>79</sup> In similar vein, the Mercury commented that "The Senate was delighted, instructed, and

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<sup>78</sup>Anonymous, Sketches of United States' Senators of the Session of 1837-'38 (n.p., 1839), 33.

<sup>79</sup>Diary of Mrs. Penelope Preston, 50.



deeply interested, to-day, by a most noble and eloquent oration of Mr. Preston. . . ."<sup>80</sup> The editors of the Congressional Globe referred to the address as an "eloquent and forcible" speech, promising to present it "to the public" as soon as the reporter could prepare his notes.<sup>81</sup>

In a word, Preston's "Speech on the Annexation of Texas," was perhaps the most brilliant deliberative address of his entire oratorical career. Keeping his central proposition in sharp focus for the full two hours that he spoke, Preston strove to establish credence primarily through a severe argumentative development. Relying on various evidences--expert opinion, statistics, examples, and factual data--he structured a strong logical case for re-annexation. Moreover, he met directly and effectively, in defending his case, the salient objections to his proposition. Furthermore, in motivating his argument he relied not only upon appeals to self-interest but also upon those of social responsibility, fair play, and altruism. Finally, Preston communicated his arguments in forceful and intelligible language.

With respect to the integrity of Preston's case, however, it seems fair to ask: Was the acquisition of Texas simply a matter of "reannexing" what formerly belonged to the United States? One writer holds that the term "reannexation" arose "because it seemed to imply that were Texas acquired, we should only be recovering our own, and

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<sup>80</sup>Charleston Mercury, April 30, 1838.

<sup>81</sup>Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 326.

also because it appeared to ease the constitutional difficulty of introducing a foreign state into the Union." Actually, however, "The United States . . . could no longer assert the slightest claim to any territory beyond the Sabine."<sup>82</sup>

Was Preston's case for re-annexation a "trick" case? Was he unaware of the serious technical arguments against such action? Or did his advocacy of re-annexation, on the ground that the United States still owned Texas, stem from questionable motives? Since substantial proof is lacking, any answer to these questions would be purely conjectural.

Eloquent and powerful as it was, Preston's effort was not sufficient to stem the tide of anti-annexation sentiment. At the same time, Preston faced a combination of forces scarcely amenable to suasive discourse. Even Southerners were not united in supporting Preston's resolutions, because of the reasons given by Sydnor:

The possibility of invoking war with Mexico, a tendency to leave the existing political equilibrium undisturbed, and fear that stimulation of cotton production in Texas would injure the Eastern cotton kingdom made many Southerners oppose any steps in the direction of immediate annexation.<sup>83</sup>

On June 14 Preston's resolution was laid on the table by a vote of 24 to 14. During the course of the discussion on Samuel Southard's motion to lay on the table, an acrimonious colloquy developed between Preston and Calhoun. Calhoun was in favor of Preston's motion but objected to that part of the preamble which referred to the

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<sup>82</sup>Smith, Annexation of Texas, 6-7.

<sup>83</sup>Sydnor, Development of Southern Sectionalism, 322.

unconstitutionality of the surrender of Texas to Spain.<sup>84</sup> Preston averred that he could "satisfy anyone" as to the validity of the declarations of the preamble, and regretted that the resolution "was to be killed by a side-blow." Calhoun retorted that he would "not shun a direct vote" on the issue; that he favored annexation, but had hoped his colleague would have "yielded his abstract declarations"; and that "at some future time" he wished "to go into the subject at length." Southard interposed to withdraw his motion to table, but John Norvell of Michigan renewed it. After the vote was taken Preston sprang to his feet to inquire whether there had been "any understanding" between Calhoun and Southard on the motion to table. Calhoun retorted acidly, "Certainly not."<sup>85</sup>

Calhoun could not brook patiently such open opposition from his colleague. Neither could he tolerate the obviously divisive influences of Preston and Waddy Thompson in the state and in the South. Throughout the extra session, charges against the two insurgent legislators had piled up. They had acted with the opposition on the Sub-Treasury. Undoubtedly they had colluded on the Texas question, for on the same day that Preston called up his resolution in the Senate, Thompson in the House moved that the Foreign Affairs Committee report a joint resolution favoring annexation. Preston had also differed with Calhoun on the question of how best to achieve Southern unity, and

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<sup>84</sup>Calhoun's touchiness on this point is understandable since he favored, while a member of Monroe's cabinet, the cession of Texas to Spain. Ironically, John Quincy Adams was the only member of Monroe's cabinet who opposed the cession.

<sup>85</sup>Charleston Mercury, June 18, 1838.

had given the senior senator "a very doubtful support" on the famous state rights resolutions. As early as May, Calhoun confided his bitterness to a relative, "What a misfortune, that we are divided among ourselves. Preston and Thompson have done much mischief--more than they ever can repair, if they were to live 100 years. . . ."86

Preston's course was even more censurable than Thompson's, for the junior senator had achieved high standing in the Whig party, and was a "friend and follower" of Henry Clay. In December, a Georgetown editor set adrift the rumor that Preston would be acceptable to the Whigs as the vice presidential nominee on a Clay ticket. The suggestion met with immediate approval among Whig leaders, many of whom believed Preston could carry the South. While Preston was obviously pleased by the compliment, he disclaimed any connection with the rumor, and sought to "put an end to the probability of the intimation being received."<sup>87</sup> To Mangum he confessed that he was "worried and displeased" at the use of his name,<sup>88</sup> and Mrs. Preston told Clay that her husband "would be killed in S. C., by having his name appended as Vice President on the Clay ticket." It was also Mrs. Preston's opinion that "Mr. J. C. Calhoun and his friends" were "filled with jealousy" towards her husband.<sup>89</sup> Throughout the regular session of Congress, the

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<sup>86</sup>Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 454-455; "Calhoun Correspondence," loc. cit., 396; Henry T. Thompson, Waddy Thompson, Jr. (Columbia, 1929), 2-5; John F. Richardson to James Chestnut, Washington, D. C., March 14, 1838. James Chestnut Papers, Caroliniana Library.

<sup>87</sup>Preston to John Tyler, Washington, D. C., December 30, 1837, in Tyler, Letters and Times of the Tylers, I, 587.

<sup>88</sup>Preston to Mangum, Washington, D. C., April 7, 1838, William Campbell Preston Papers.

<sup>89</sup>Diary of Mrs. Penelope Preston, 49.

movement of a Clay-Preston ticket gained strength, however, and in June the newly-established National Whig, a Washington campaign paper, announced in its "prospectus" that it would support the two, "subject to the decision of the National Convention--in the meantime expressing our preference for them."<sup>90</sup>

Calhoun was not disposed to let pass all of these political transgressions of Preston and his South Carolina allies. Accordingly, when the South Carolina legislature met in special session in May to relieve the sufferers of a Charleston fire, Calhoun availed himself of the opportunity to deliver the coup de grace to Preston and Thompson. The Rhett-Elmore clique, manipulators of Calhoun's will, delivered the thrust by driving through a set of resolutions endorsing the Sub-Treasury resolutions of the preceding session, and repudiating the "sop thrown out at that time to Preston and his friends." Specifically, it was resolved that "any public servant who refuses to promote the . . . [Resolutions favoring the Sub-Treasury] pursues a course injurious to the welfare and prosperity of the State." The resolutions passed by a majority vote in both houses.<sup>91</sup>

One of the avowed objects of this action was to compel Preston to resign his senatorial seat. Francis Pickens, a Calhoun lieutenant, who helped to engineer the campaign against Preston advised another Calhounite, "It is absolutely necessary that he [Preston] be forced

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<sup>90</sup>Quoted in Charleston Mercury, June 5, 1838.

<sup>91</sup>Meigs, Life of John C. Calhoun, II, 200; Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 386; White, Robert Barnwell Rhett, 41-42; Diary of Mrs. Penelope Preston, 62-63; Jervey, Life and Times of Robert Y. Hayne, 461.



to resign. He is doing us more injury than all our opponents together, because he is without the slightest principle, and his whole study now is to divide the South and sustain Clay."<sup>92</sup> Mrs. Preston, who learned from her father in Columbia, that Praston had been "instructed," noted that Calhoun had "deprecated the doctrine of instruction" two years before, but now "had disgraced . . . South Carolina by making her instruct her senator Mr. Preston." She also noted that Preston bore the whole affair with perfect equanimity, remarking, "Mr. Preston seems calm, but what is better, I believe, feels calmly."<sup>93</sup>

But the action of the Calhoun faction was calculated to leave scars and to drive Preston closer to Clay. Already he was regarded both in and out of the state as "a thorough Whig," and a "follower of Clay." By his own private admission, moreover, his admiration for the colorful Kentuckian had grown with the years of association in the Senate. To Tyler he wrote of Clay, "My respect and admiration for him have increased with my knowledge of him. I believe him a great man and a good patriot. . . ." Besides, the two senators shared a mutual antipathy for the "power and patronage party."<sup>94</sup>

Yet, while Praston was obviously a Whig convert and a Clay supporter, he lacked the boldness to assert it publicly, realizing

<sup>92</sup>Pickens to Patrick Noble, Washington, D. C., May 23, 1838, quoted in Alice Noble Waring (ed.), "Five Letters From Francis W. Pickens to Patrick Noble, 1835-1838," South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine, LIV (January, 1953), 79.

<sup>93</sup>Diary of Mrs. Penelope Preston, 60-64.

<sup>94</sup>Anonymous, Sketches of United States' Senators of the Session of 1837-38, 34; Charleston Mercury, July 12, 1838; Diary of Mrs. Penelope Preston, 66; Preston to Tyler, Washington, D. C., December 30, 1837, quoted in Tyler, Letters and Times of the Tylers, I, 587; Richmond Whig, quoted in Niles' National Register, LIV (August 18, 1838), 392-393.



that to do so would commit him to the political potter's field in South Carolina where few men were hated and distrusted more than the author of the American system. Instead, he chose to remain non-committal, and to await the tide of events. Calhoun publicly disclaimed the charge that he was a "Van Buren man." Preston, on the other hand, remained silent on the charge that he was a "Clay man." Such a course could only prove fatal in the South Carolina of the 1830's where Calhoun was a veritable dictator, and where "an open South Carolina game" marked the course of honor. In the continuing struggle Preston found himself sorely handicapped by his "inability to marshal a corps of thoroughgoing friends."

## CHAPTER IX

### VICTIM OF THE CALHOUN PURGE

The long and ardent struggle between the Calhounites and the State Rights Whigs, as predicted by Preston, entered a critical stage during the months immediately following the adjournment of the second session of the Twenty-fifth Congress. The Rhett-Elmore machine had achieved a complete victory for Calhoun in the legislature. As the off-year state campaign got underway in the early summer of 1838, the big question was whether Calhoun's course would be sustained at the ballot box.

Upon his return to South Carolina in early July, Preston was not without evidences favoring Whig successes. Prior to embarking from Washington, he received an invitation from a Whig committee of Halifax, Virginia, to a dinner honoring him for his "steady devotion to and able support of, principles dear to all true Whigs," his "constant, unwearied and eloquent defence of the Constitution when attacked by many and defended by few," and his "efficient and manly resistance of tyranny and corruption of the most dangerous Administration which this or any other country has been cursed with."<sup>1</sup> Preston responded by declaring his inability to accept the invitation, but he seized the occasion to recount the leading charges against the

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<sup>1</sup>Niles' National Register, LIV (August 18, 1838), 392.

"expungers," and to restate his reasons for remaining in opposition. He also pointed out that the Whigs could take "consolation" in the recent "rebuks" of the "power and patronage party" whose Sub-Treasury scheme was killed by the House. He hastened to warn, however, that the Whigs must yet realize that "no defeat, however disgraceful" could turn the Van Buren party from "the error of its ways." His injunction was, "Let us repel the Stuarts whoever may replace them."<sup>2</sup> The Richmond Whig, commenting on Preston's course, declared that Calhoun's colleague "is now attracting the sympathy of all in the land," for his "noble fight" against the "reigning dynasty."<sup>3</sup>

Preston also found a measure of consolation in the outcome of the famous disputed Mississippi election in which the Whigs, Seargent S. Prentiss and T. J. Word, were finally seated in Congress after a second victory at the polls. Mrs. Preston recorded that her husband dined with the "Whig members from Mississippi" at Boulangers, and that "it is some consolation to Mr. Preston to find other Southern States so decidedly anti-administration; although his own has deserted him, and gone to Calhoun and Van Buren."<sup>4</sup>

The most heartening sign to Preston, however, was the rejection of the "specie exacting Sub-Treasury" by both houses of Congress, and the defeat of Sub-Treasury, "without specie exaction" by a majority of four in the House. The former measure, a Calhoun bill, had lost in

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 392-393.

<sup>3</sup>Richmond Whig, quoted, ibid., 392.

<sup>4</sup>Dickey, Seargent S. Prentiss, 92-131; Diary of Mrs. Penelope Preston, 65.

the House by a majority of fourteen; in the Senate, by a majority of nine. Thus, it was evident that "the Sub-Treasury with the receipt of the bills of specie paying banks" was a "more favored" measure than the "specie exacting" Sub-Treasury. The defeat of the general measure in the House, Preston had the further consolation of knowing, was chiefly the result of the negative votes of Legare, Campbell, and Thompson.<sup>5</sup> Preston wrote exultantly after the fall of the Sub-Treasury bill, "Sub-Treasury is dead--and the Administration--like Lazarus when he was three days dead--stinketh."<sup>6</sup>

Finally, Preston viewed with much satisfaction the vigor and resoluteness of the Georgia Whigs. They were ably led, he noted, and had resisted untiringly the advance of Calhounism. He also noted that they were "confident" of ultimate victory.<sup>7</sup>

Understandably, Preston entertained hopes that the South--if not his own state--would rally under the State Rights Whig banner. In the South Carolina campaign, which began in July, the combatants neither gave nor asked quarter. To Calhoun, it was an earnest battle to defeat Legare and Thompson, and to discredit Preston, whose term in the Senate would expire in 1842. To Preston it was a fight for political survival.

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<sup>5</sup>Preston to his Richland constituents, September 3, 1838, quoted in Niles' National Register, LV (September 29, 1838), 78; Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 391.

<sup>6</sup>Preston to Bowyer, Washington, D. C., April 17, 1838, Preston Family Papers.

<sup>7</sup>Preston to Wilda, Washington, D. C., May, 1838, William C. Preston Papers; Preston to Bowyer, Washington, D. C., May 8, 1838, Preston Family Papers.

Late in July certain of Preston's Richland friends arranged a barbecue to give him an "opportunity of addressing his constituents." Since the invitation did not include Elmore and Calhoun, the Calhoun faction in Columbia condemned the action of the Arrangements Committee, branding the barbecue a "party" affair. The Committee promptly extended invitations to Elmore and Calhoun in an effort to placate the disgruntled Calhounites. Calhoun declined the invitation in a characteristically blunt letter, declaring his inability to appear at a festivity designed to endorse Preston's course. The "cast iron man" would not be placated, and wrote exultantly to Duff Green, "The Preston dinner is considered a failure."<sup>8</sup>

The barbecue, held on July 28, gave Preston an opportunity to restate his case against the Van Buren party and its leading measure, the Sub-Treasury, and to justify his break with Calhoun. Following a toast to him as "a fearless and eloquent advocate of southern principles," Preston came forward and, according to the Telescope, addressed the audience "in a speech of very great eloquence, in relation to his own public course, and the political questions now before the country."<sup>9</sup> Before a cheering crowd of "six or eight hundred gentlemen," Preston marshaled his full powers of wit, sarcasm and ridicule in a searing assault on the "Van Buren party" and its Sub-Treasury scheme, which the Mercury termed "by no means fair, just, or effective."<sup>10</sup> Speaking

<sup>8</sup>"Calhoun Correspondence," loc. cit., 393.

<sup>9</sup>Columbia Telescope, quoted in Niles' National Register, LIV (August 18, 1838), 392.

<sup>10</sup>Charleston Mercury, quoted ibid., (August 11, 1838), 369.

of his own course, Preston compared himself to Curtius, the Roman, of whom it was said, "He would save his beloved State, even from herself." He maintained that he had "not changed"--that he was sent to Washington "to oppose Martin Van Buren, and was opposed to him still." He was also reported as saying that he differed from Clay "thoroughly and radically on cardinal points of faith and principle," and was "not the man for Mr. Clay, nor Mr. Clay the man for him."<sup>11</sup>

Preston's speech evoked a prompt refutation from the Calhoun faction in the form of a series of four letters signed "Turnbull," which was carried in the Columbia Times and Gazette and reprinted by the Mercury. In brief, "Turnbull" charged that Preston's was a "non-committal" position in which he denounced the Sub-Treasury, but offered no "remedy" of his own; and, that Preston's course was "inconsistent" since Van Buren's principles had "materially changed in favor of South Carolina," and pointed out that Clay and Preston differed "radically on cardinal points of faith and principle."<sup>12</sup>

In little less than a month the "Turnbull" letters were followed by an oral blast at the backers of Sub-Treasury. The Calhoun faction in Columbia arranged a barbecue "to the hon. F. H. Elmore . . . and our two senators, the Hon. John C. Calhoun, and the Hon. Wm. C.

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Waddy Thompson did not attend the Preston barbecue, but sent a letter to the committee which condemned sharply the intolerant spirit of the Calhoun faction. He concluded his letter with the toast: "Public office: not to be desired by an honorable man, when held upon the tenure of one man's will and at the sacrifice of opinions honestly held."

<sup>11</sup>Charleston Mercury, August 17, 1838.

<sup>12</sup>See "Turnbull Letters," Charleston Mercury, August 17, 18, 20, 28, 1838.



Preston." Calhoun declined the invitation because "of the season of the year, the great distance, and other causes not necessary to state," but sent a letter in which he invited the anti-Sub-Treasury group to make a "review" of the "great question." Preston also declined in a cordial letter which disclaimed any intention of recrimination. He would not consider his "principles compromised" should he accept the invitation. His reason for declining to attend was therefore prompted by "very different considerations." He explained that he had already attended such a festival where he had given full and free expression to his views; now he was inclined to allow Elmore "the same unchecked communication with his constituents." Preston's letter, which was widely published, related masterfully his case against the Sub-Treasury. It also recounted the "ignominious acts of the royalist party," and avowed his consistency in opposing it. Its concluding words were: "I stand in the same rank--shoulder to shoulder with the same men now as in 1834--and driving the storm of opposition against the same profligate party."<sup>13</sup>

The "Richland Festival," as the Elmore barbecue was termed, was attended by an audience of "from ten to fourteen hundred." Elmore propounded on "the great question of the day" in a herangue of four hours which was termed "judicious, instructive and effective."<sup>14</sup> The Columbia Telescope declared that the Elmore speech was "decidedly in

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<sup>13</sup>Columbia South Carolinian, quoted in Charleston Mercury, September 17, 1838; Niles' National Register, LV (September 29, 1838), 75-79; Columbia Telescope, September 15, 1838; Charleston Courier, September 18, 1838.

<sup>14</sup>Columbia South Carolinian, quoted in Charleston Mercury, September 17, 1838.

support of the present Administration."<sup>15</sup>

The summer campaign was a bitter one. A deluge of regular and volunteer toasts poured out at barbecues and party rallies. At a Pickens district celebration in July, for example, Preston was pronounced "an alien by birth and a traitor to the state of his adoption." Again, at Abbeville, one of the regular toasts was, "Legare, Campbell, and Thompson, recreants to the South. . . . W. C. Preston: He has betrayed the trust reposed in him."<sup>16</sup> The two major points of attack on Preston from the platform and the editor's desk were (1) his opposition to the Sub-Treasury and (2) his "uniting and acting" with Henry Clay.

In October, when the ballots were counted, Calhoun could not claim a decisive victory. While Legare was defeated by Isaac Holmes, a Calhoun candidate, by a "two-to-one margin," the yeomanry of Calhoun's own district, on the other hand, returned Waddy Thompson to the House by a handsome majority.<sup>17</sup> For both Preston and Thompson, however, the ultimate outcome of the "long and ardent struggle" was imminently clear: victory in South Carolina for Calhoun. Although victorious in the state election, Thompson wrote to Preston: "I suppose the game is fairly up now. How many of us are to be in at the death? . . . it is mainly because I look to defeat that I am desirous to write my name down as one who tried to save the country.

<sup>15</sup>Columbia Telescope, September 15, 1838.

<sup>16</sup>Charleston Courier, July 17, 1838.

<sup>17</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 392-393; Thompson, Waddy Thompson, Jr., 5-6.

My own opinion is that the game will be a long and doubtful one. What think you? . . ."<sup>18</sup> Preston's reaction to the Calhoun onslaught has been told by John Quincy Adams, who recorded on December 11:

Walking to the House this morning, I overtook Mr. Preston. . . . He spoke of the electioneering campaign which . . . he had been obliged to pass through in South Carolina, in a subdued tone of indifference, unwilling to disclose the bitterness of his soul.<sup>19</sup>

Calhoun believed victory in the state "secure" and planned no further move until Clay had been destroyed, because "the fall of Clay, which seems almost certain, is the signal for the complete prostration of Preston, Thompson and others of his active and leading partisans in this State and the South generally."<sup>20</sup>

It was doubtless obvious to Preston, as it was to his political enemies in South Carolina, that in the event of Clay's fall there would be scarcely any ground upon which the decimated State Rights Whigs of South Carolina could rally. Preston's political fate was thus more than ever contingent upon the outcome of Clay's, and the only palatable alternative remaining was to throw his full support behind Clay and the principles of Whiggery.

Such necessity became even more apparent as the short session of the Twenty-fifth Congress convened in December, 1838. The administration forces, with their newly-found State Rights allies, were in a clear majority, and controlled the Senate organization. Preston was

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<sup>18</sup>Thompson to Preston, Edgefield, October 30, 1838, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Amsterdam, Holland.

<sup>19</sup>Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, X, 59-60.

<sup>20</sup>"Calhoun Correspondence," loc. cit., 417.

virtually handcuffed by being placed on the Committee of Manufactures and the Committee of Military Affairs with administration majorities. Also, as he declared, he was "turned out" of the Library Committee, and "his colleague engrossed all the favors of the Administration."<sup>21</sup>

But from his place in the Senate chamber he could still send his scorching periods against the men and measures of the "power and patronage" party. And this he did not hesitate to do. Yet he confessed to have found more excitement and challenge in the coalition struggle with Old Hickory, writing, "We have a very dull time of it in the opposition. . . . Van Buren offers no resistance. There was some effront [sic] with his predecessor--for the blood more stood to move a lion than to start a hare."<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, with characteristic boldness, Preston spoke out at the slightest sign of infringement upon the Constitution and the liberties of the people. During the session he entered debate on the bill to postpone the fourth instalment of the federal deposits with the states; on the bill for the regulation and reduction of the price of the public lands; and on the "proposition" to admit reporters to seats in the Senate.<sup>23</sup> But it was not until February 15, only two weeks before the close of the session, that he found a challenging

<sup>21</sup>Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 17; Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, X, 59.

<sup>22</sup>Preston to Wilde, Washington, D. C., May 17, 1838, William C. Preston Papers.

<sup>23</sup>Cong. Globe and Appendix, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 30, 37, 84, 114, 100, 101, 102.

issue occasioned by a bill introduced by John J. Crittenden of Kentucky, providing that certain federal employees should be dismissed "for interference in elections."<sup>24</sup> Specifically, the Crittenden bill provided that after April 1, 1838, no federal employee

shall, by word, message, or writing, or in any other manner whatsoever, endeavor to persuade any elector to give, or dissuade any elector from giving, his vote for the choice of any person . . . to serve in any public office established by law in any . . . State; nor shall any such officer . . . intermeddle in any of the . . . elections. . . .<sup>25</sup>

The bill was referred to the Judiciary Committee, headed by Garrett D. Wall of New Jersey, who, on January 31, presented a condemnatory report of considerable length. Denouncing both the principles and the object of the Crittenden bill, the report maintained that all citizens, whether federal officers or not, had not only the right but also the duty of discussing freely "the measures of any Administration, and the character and conduct of those who oppose or support it"; that such activity was "innocent and praiseworthy, even if the motive is the acquisition of public office"; that the bill would have the ill effect of "creating a caste among [federal and state] office holders, deriving their authority from the same high source, the people . . ."; and, that the committee had no evidence of violation of the "purity of elections" by federal employees.<sup>26</sup>

After the reading of the report, Crittenden was on his feet immediately to ask an early opportunity to expose the "sophistries"

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 160.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 157.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 157-160.

of the report. Realizing the propaganda value of the report, the administration majority quickly carried a motion to print for distribution 20,000 copies. Crittenden's bill was then made a special order for February 7.

The Kentucky senator's elaborate defense of his measure touched off a stirring debate which was productive of a host of lengthy addresses designed chiefly for home consumption. Five such efforts had been made by February 15, the day on which Preston spoke.<sup>27</sup>

Some notion of Preston's mien and platform manner on the occasion of this address may be inferred from an account written by Magoon, a nineteenth century writer on oratory, who journeyed from New York to Washington to "hear the lions" roar, but particularly to "see and hear" Preston. Magoon described Preston as "a somewhat large and decidedly heavy-looking personage, with brown coat and a little switch-cane, round-shouldered, yellowish wig, and florid complexion. . . ." Magoon noted also that Preston was "trudging about" the Senate chamber before business began "with good natured greetings to all in a kind of whining tone and careless air, everywhere greeted with smiles, and with everybody cracking a joke." When Preston rose to address the Senate, however, Magoon saw "a different person."

He insensibly assumed an erect position, as elastic as it was commanding; his countenance changed its aspect. . . .; his muscles rounded out in a fuller and fairer symmetry; and the veins of his forehead swelled. . . .; his voice was suddenly changed into deep and mellow tones, with now and then a slight trembling that indicated intense emotion. . . .; every eye and ear of a rapidly gathered throng seemed entranced before the speaker as he

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 179, 183, 189, 190, 194, 197.



fulminated like one truly inspired.<sup>28</sup>

The central issue of the debate--restriction of executive power and the limitation of patronage--was calculated to engage Preston's earnest attention and draw forth his sharpest rhetorical weapons. Here was his favored theme. But he, like many of his colleagues, saw in the issue an opportunity to build political strength for the coming presidential campaign of 1840. His stated rhetorical objective, as well as the various topics he discussed, reveals clearly his interest in reaching the remote audience. In his peroration, he declared it his aim to counteract the Wall report by refuting its doctrines, which were to be disseminated as "the principles of the party in power." If the 20,000 copies were sent out, he declared:

the people will be forewarned and forearmed, and, knowing the purposes of those in power, they will be sufficiently notified that they ought to be on the alert against them; and if they do not then defend their liberty, it will only be another proof that it is not tyrants who make slaves, but slaves who make tyrants.

In this extemporaneous rhetorical effort Preston sought to establish the proposition that the Wall report negated both the "principle and the policy" of Crittenden's bill.<sup>29</sup> But he went further, quoting freely from the report, to show that the committee actually argued that "it is the bounden duty of the executive officers to interfere in elections, and that any restriction upon them is unconstitutional, proscriptive, horrible, and monstrous, and deserving the severest possible castigation of the committee." Preston devoted

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<sup>28</sup>g. L. Magoon, Living Orators in America (New York, 1849), 347-349.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 339-343.

almost half of his address to a hair-splitting examination of the phraseology of the Wall report. Despite the tangled syntax of the reported address, it is evident that in a few instances Preston wrenched excerpts out of context and laid unjust constructions upon them. He did demonstrate, however, that if the Wall report did not actually praise interference in elections by federal employees, it at least strongly implied sanction of such action.

Preston also spent some time in refutation of the committee premise that the "federal office holders are the people." The report, he declared, "goes on the ground of protecting the guaranteed rights of the people." But are federal office holders the people? They were "part and parcel" of the Government; they held their office at the will of the Executive. The Executive should be "guarded and limited," he went on. One method of accomplishing this, therefore, was to curb the influence of federal employees on elections under the Crittenden measure.

In the course of refuting the committee's key premise, Preston availed himself of the opportunity to offer a discerning analysis of the two leading schools of political thought--the Federal and the State Rights Republican. The radical mistake of assuming that "the office holders and the Government are the people," Preston charged, was a natural result of "the school [Federalism] in which gentlemen have been nurtured." From this statement he moved into his analysis of the opposing political schools, showing that one--Federalism--was dedicated to the consolidation of power in the government; and that the other--Republicanism--was devoted to the liberties of the

individual citizen, and therefore aimed at limiting the powers of the government. To the latter philosophy Preston subscribed, declaring:

I, for one, who was born under the influence of these principles, had them infused in me during the whole of my youth, and have cherished them ever since as the breath of life, will not permit myself to be schooled in these doctrines [of Federalism]. . . .

After thus reaffirming his political faith, Preston turned to a refutation of the committee's declaration that federal office holders are "appointed by the people" and are "agents of the people." But was this "the fact?" "No sir," Preston exclaimed, "they hold their office in spite of the people, by Executive power, and for Executive purposes." From his place, Clay spurred his lieutenant on, adding, "And often against their wishes!" The speaker continued: "Notoriously so. The people are flouted, and their opposition is the reason why these men are appointed and retained in office." His own state, he averred, offered a prime example.

It had also been alleged in the Wall report that the committee was unaware of executive power being "brought in conflict with elections." Preston's method of refutation was, first, to adduce the testimony of Jefferson and Jackson that the evil existed. Second, he called upon one of his favored devices of refutation--the use of his adversaries' testimony to carry his point. First, he quoted from a report made by Benton "when he was a leader in the opposition," explaining the operations of executive influence on federal employees and branding it an "evil." Also, he did not pass up the chance to cite Calhoun's report of 1837 on the power of the Executive, quoting his colleague at length. The gist of the Calhoun report was that "the expenditures

of the revenue" had become "subservient to corruptions." Turning great pressure on Calhoun, Preston went on to declare his colleague's report "full of wisdom," and to point out that Wall's report had, in effect, pronounced the Calhoun report "unconstitutional, unwise, and tyrannical."

Preston's final thrust at the unfavorable committee report was to show that the committee had repudiated "the free doctrines of our European ancestors." He charged sarcastically:

Well does it become him [Wall], under a Democratic Government, to denounce all control of public officers; ay, and when monarchical Europe, with its Kings and despotic laws, yet impose fetters on their executive officers for the security of popular rights. . . .

In a word, he went on to say, "English liberty says the wolf shall be caged; but the gentleman says, no; keep down the iron bars; he is part of the flock." Preston proceeded next to pronounce in characteristically sensory diction an encomium on "the spirit of British liberty." Finally, he read two cases from a history of England to show that in England interference in elections by the Crown was regarded "an indignity."

In a brief peroration Preston appealed to the Senate "to place some mark of . . . reprobation on the report," and closed by forewarning the country against the alarming doctrines of the Wall report.

Debate on Crittenden's bill continued until February 27, when both Crittenden and Wall "spoke at length." An amendment to restrict the bill to the subscription of "sums of money to carry on elections" was tried and lost by a vote of 15 to 26. Also a motion by Rives to recommit the bill to the Committee on the Judiciary was lost. Preston

voted for both motions. The question was then taken on the engrossment of the bill, and was decided negatively by a vote of 28 to 5. Preston voted with the yeas, his colleague with the nays.<sup>30</sup>

Again Preston had lost a battle in his crusade against the increase of executive power and patronage. Unquestionably, the measure was open to serious objections, particularly on the grounds of undesirability. Few senators doubted the existence of the problem. But many argued with cogency that the bill would introduce new and serious evils. Particularly was it objected that the measure would have the effect of restricting freedom of speech and press; and that it would place the "right of suffrage under an odious espionage," whereby jealous aspirants to office would "torture" the words of federal employees "into an endeavor" to influence elections. Also, it was maintained by opponents of the bill that it would commit too much "discretionary power" to the Judiciary, and create a "judicial despotism." These were indeed reasonable objections.

It is difficult to hazard final judgments on Preston's invention, disposition, or style in this particular speech, because of textual shortcomings. Much of the address as reported was paraphrased. Also, some of Preston's remarks "were not well heard by the Reporter." Again, garbled syntax mure the meaning of numerous passages. If it can be assumed, however, that the argument of the speech is not truncated, then the integrity of Preston's case is open to question.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 200, 207, 210, 226. Clay's vote on the bill is not recorded. Crittenden, his colleague, and author of the bill, voted, however, with the nays.



Some of his conclusions seem valid, but others were arrived at by overzealous constructions on single terms. On the other hand, Preston demonstrated ably the existence and alarming dimensions of executive influence, using ingeniously the testimony of Benton and Calhoun, administration spokesmen.

By his own admission, Preston's speech was aimed at the remote audience, and as it transpired his subtle appeal for Whig support was but the prelude to his own entry on the public stage in full Whig costume. On March 11, little more than a week after Congress adjourned, he attended a meeting of the Philadelphia Democratic Whig Association. A large audience assembled in the city court house to hear the visiting Southerner. After a brief speech by John Sargeant, Preston "was loudly called for," and "came forward amid the cheers of the company." What followed was Preston's public avowal of his commitment to the principles of Whiggery and to Henry Clay.

The content of Preston's address was well adapted to the speaker and to the occasion. He partitioned his utterances into (1) a clarification and justification of his own course, (2) a plea for Whig unity, and (3) an endorsement of Clay as the 1840 Whig presidential candidate.<sup>31</sup>

Preston first identified himself properly with his hearers, expressing the pleasure which he felt in "once more meeting his Whig brethren of Philadelphia." It had been five years since he had visited

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<sup>31</sup>United States Gazette, quoted in Niles' National Register, LVI (March 23, 1839), 54-55, and in Washington National Intelligencer, March 15, 1839.



the city "on the invitation of those whom he now had the pleasure of meeting." Moving into the body of his speech, he proceeded to clarify his political position and assert his political credo. In Philadelphia five years before, Preston recalled, he had "stood side by side with men whose lead he was proud to follow." Those men were now "mostly estranged from him." The causes of the estrangement, he pointed out, had been such as to leave him standing alone, the solitary Whig member of the United States Senate south of the Potomac." Preston next reviewed briefly his political course and asserted his political principles. After reviewing the "severe contest" the Whigs had been "compelled" to make in Congress since 1834, he declared that he now avowed the same principles he had stood upon since 1834; that he now battled against the same abuses of power and executive usurpation that he did then; and, that "by the help of God, he would maintain that ground and fight that battle to the last, flinch who might."

Preston next made his plea for Whig unity. He advised that the Whigs must sustain the "broad principles of Whiggism" to achieve triumph. If the Whigs, he continued, failed to "press forward in the good cause," "defeat was certain." Prospects for a Whig victory, however, were good. Tennessee, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi were with the party, by virtue of the "conservative principles of Whiggism." These principles had sent to Congress a Wise of Virginia, a Dawson of Georgia, a Prentiss of Mississippi, a Bell of Tennessee, and a Stanley of Tennessee, "and nobly" had these men sustained the "glorious cause."

Preston proceeded to his final topic, declaring that it was

perhaps not becoming of him to "speak here of men." Yet, since the Whig flag could not be suspended without a "hand to hold it aloft," he must be indulged "a remark or two upon this subject." What followed was a decorous and inspiring eulogy of Henry Clay. To the hand of Clay "and to no other man," he urged, the Whig banner must be trusted. Clay was a "noble" spirit, Preston averred. Preston reflected that he had warmly opposed Clay "before he knew him," and had gone into the Senate in 1833 with a "suspicious eye" toward him. But his "prejudices" had given way "gradually" to the "power of truth." "I have become an admirer of Clay," Preston confessed, but not because of his eloquence nor yet because of his great services to the country--these virtues were "well known." It was because of Clay's noble nature, "his fearless support of what his judgment told him was right," regardless of consequences. Preston spoke now from experience. "No man ever looked danger in the eye with a more determined, unblenching countenance, when in the pursuit of truth, or the sustinment of right, than Henry Clay. (Great cheering)" At this point, noted the reporter, the audience cheered "three times three and asked for 'one more' before they allowed the speaker to proceed." Nearing the conclusion of his address, Preston sought to enhance his ethos as he also humanized his hero. He recounted an episode of recent occurrence which his audience would probably recall. Clay had done him the honor of "sending for and consulting" with him in reference to a senatorial address he planned to make on the abolition question.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>The reference is to Clay's "Speech on Abolition" of February 7, 1839, in which he declared against slavery. He averred that the plan of gradual emancipation of slaves had failed, chiefly because of

After stating what he proposed, I suggested whether there would not be danger in it, whether such a course would not injure his own prospects, as well as those of the Whig party in general. His reply was, "I did not send for you to ask what might be the effect of the proposed movement on my prospects, but whether it was right; I had rather be right than be president."<sup>33</sup>

In one felicitous stroke Preston had humanized Clay, furnished the Clay Whigs with a campaign slogan, and posterity with an epigrammatic quotation.<sup>34</sup> Continuing, the Whig orator suggested that this utterance was such as "might have fallen from the lips of one of the ancients of Greece or Rome." The "sentiment" was, moreover, indicative of the "high purposes" of Clay's "soul." Concluding, Preston declared:

I avow myself, therefore, for Henry Clay. I will not say I believe the Whigs will be defeated unless they rally as one man, in a solid phalanx, around him and their principles. I know it. It is inevitable. . . . May it be my lot to congratulate you hereafter upon your victory, rather than console with you, and mourn with the country on your defeat!

Politically, this speech marked the completion of Preston's migration from the position of a Calhoun Nullifier to that of a Henry Clay Whig. In this address, the Carolinian broke his silence on the

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the activities of the abolitionists. But he went on to express his wish that he could be "instrumental" in removing "the foul stain" of slavery from the "character of the country." The speech not only increased the hostility of the abolitionists against Clay, but also incurred further disfavor for Clay in the South. Subsequent to this speech, a number of Whig leaders in the North, chiefly anti-Masons, sought to defeat Clay's nomination at the Harrisburg Convention. Carl Schurz, Henry Clay, 3 vols. (Boston, 1887), II, 175; Washington National Intelligencer, February 9, 1839.

<sup>33</sup>One writer renders the final lines of this passage as follows: "I trust the sentiments and opinions are correct; I had rather be right than be president." Sargeant, Public Men and Events, II, 74.

<sup>34</sup>The Clay quotation is listed in numerous collections of familiar quotations. One of the earliest works in which it appears is Samuel Arthur Bent, Familiar Short Sayings of Great Men (Boston, 1882), 149.

question of his political affiliation, and placed upon the public record his allegiance to Clay and his wholehearted endorsement of the Kentuckian as the Whig standard bearer. Unquestionably, too, there was at least a grain of truth in the Pendleton Messenger's charge that Preston's advocacy of Clay's candidacy was merely for "personal preferment" should Clay be nominated and elected.<sup>35</sup> To what extent Preston's speech was designed to promote himself as the second man on a Clay ticket, however, is a matter of conjecture. Undeniably, Preston was never more sincere than when he affirmed in Philadelphia his belief that Clay was the Whigs' best choice. Privately he expressed the same view.

Mr. Clay is the favourite of the Whigs . . . and his name is the only name that affords any hopes of relief from the present dynasty. Mr. Clay entertains many opinions which I believe to be fundamentally erroneous--and if he were president the hopes of the country would be in his sound sense--his high character his bold and free spirit--and that broad and zealous patriotism which eminently belongs to him. In these essential particulars there is no man of the administration party at all his equal. . . .<sup>36</sup>

Rhetorically, Preston's address was, in the main, an able one. Yet his revelation of his role in Clay's anti-abolition stand in the Senate was unquestionably a two-edged persuasive technique. While it tended to enhance the speaker's ethos by associating him intimately with the popular Kentuckian, it also tended to throw him upon slippery ground by projecting the negative idea that he was wobbly on the abolition question, and possibly willing to straddle the issue in

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<sup>35</sup>Pendleton Messenger, March 29, 1839.

<sup>36</sup>Preston to Bowyer, Washington, D. C., January 11, 1839, Preston Family Papers.

order to gather Clay support. Nevertheless, in a letter he expressed the idea in terms similar to those of the Philadelphia speech, declaring that he merely believed Clay's speech would not be "satisfactory to the ultras of either side."<sup>37</sup> Consequently, the declaration left Preston open for a fresh volley from the Calhoun press. The Pendleton Messenger suggested that Preston was placing "the vital interests of the South in the balance with the petty plans of an office seeking clique. . . ." Preston promptly entered his defense, asserting that the United States Gazette had misconstrued his words: that he had merely suggested to Clay that the speech might not be satisfactory to the "ultras of either side."<sup>38</sup> Thus, Preston's declaration in Philadelphia suggests either rhetorical ineptness or a measure of honesty which his South Carolina political enemies were unwilling to ascribe to him--possibly both. To at least one contemporary rhetorical critic, Preston's public statement was puzzling. John Quincy Adams wrote, "It is indeed curious that Preston has avowed in a speech at a Whig meeting . . . that he was one of a small party of friends to whom Clay read his anti-abolition speech before he delivered it in the Senate."<sup>39</sup>

Both Clay and Preston saw their hopes demolished by the National Whig Convention which met at Harrisburg in December, 1839.

<sup>37</sup>Preston to Bowyer, Washington, D. C., February 3, 1839, William Campbell Preston Papers.

<sup>38</sup>Charleston Mercury, April 4, May 7, 1839. In view of Preston's remarks to Bowyer, there is a strong likelihood that Preston was misquoted by the Philadelphia paper.

<sup>39</sup>Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, X, 116.



The Convention chose William Henry Harrison as the Whig nominee, giving John Tyler second position on the ticket.<sup>40</sup> Among the numerous objections to Clay was his newly-announced position on the abolition of slavery, prompted, many believed, by his hope of forming in the South a party favorable to his nomination. Unquestionably, too, Clay hoped that such a party might be formed around Preston, the rebel Nullifier. Ironically, however, Clay's anti-abolition speech boomeranged, and the Southern Whig leaders failed to enlist under the Clay-Preston banner. Some observers felt that Clay would lose more than he would gain by the anti-abolition speech.<sup>41</sup> Others noted, too, that Preston remained Clay's "only prominent supporter at the South."<sup>42</sup> Neither Clay nor Preston attended the Whig Convention to witness the unpalatable result,<sup>43</sup> and, as it transpired, the Southern states of South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Arkansas did not send delegates to Harrisburg.<sup>44</sup>

During the first session of the Twenty-sixth Congress, which met in December, 1839, Preston was an active participant in Senate proceedings but made no extended speeches. Most of his energies appear

<sup>40</sup>Niles' National Register, LVII (December 14, 1839), 248-252.

<sup>41</sup>Hulsemann, Sur les Principaux Membres du Congrès, 9; Sargent, Public Men and Events, II, 74.

<sup>42</sup>Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, X, 116.

<sup>43</sup>Preston's absence may have been enforced by his wife's feeble health, which, he wrote to Mangum, was "worse this fall than usual." Preston to Mangum, Columbia, December 3, 1839, quoted in Henry T. Shanks (ed.), The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, 4 vols. (Raleigh, 1953-1955), III, 25-26.

<sup>44</sup>Niles' National Register, LVII (December 7, 1839), 225.



to have been consumed in badgering the leaders of the administration. One such partisan effort deserves mention for the light it throws upon Preston's rhetorical practice.

With an eye to the dwindling financial resources of the Van Buren administration, Benton and Felix Grundy of Tennessee formulated a resolution declaring it "impolitic and dangerous" for the federal government to assume any debts of the states "contracted for local purposes." A select committee headed by Grundy returned a report on January 30 which argued the unconstitutionality and inexpediency of such an assumption of state debts. The report precipitated an "earnest and animated" debate which was continued throughout the day. The leading affirmative participants were Benton, Grundy, and Bedford Brown of North Carolina. Arguing against the measure were the "Whig lions," Crittenden, Webster, Southard, and Preston.<sup>45</sup>

One account of the debate was left by Philip Hone, a wealthy, social-minded Whig from New York who "sat near Preston on the floor of the Senate whilst he was speaking." The partisan Hone wrote euphemistically of the Whig show of power:

What a host! Never was [there] a time in the British parliament when four such men [Webster, Preston, Crittenden, and Southard] made speeches upon one subject. They were all great, but I was most pleased with Mr. Preston. It was the first time I had ever heard the eloquent South Carolinian. . . .

Hone wrote that Preston poured forth a "cataract of eloquence" upon "these tinkers of government jobs," and that the Whig orator said to

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<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, (February 8, 1840), 379; Cong. Globe, 26th Congress, 1st Sess., 155.

him after concluding, "There! . . . I made that speech on purpose for you. I had no idea that you should go home without showing you what I could do."<sup>46</sup>

Preston's purposes on this occasion were doubtless inspired less by a desire to communicate a message than to exhibit his rhetorical virtuosity before an admiring gallery audience and to bait the Van Buren orators. To Hugh L. White he wrote, "We badgered Mr. Grundy about his report on state debt,--and drove it back to the committee. He is said never to have been so thoroughly discomfited. . . ."<sup>47</sup>

Early in the session Preston seized upon an opportunity to harass the administration in a short ceremonial address, which was occasioned by a public dinner given in Washington in honor of Hugh L. White, who resigned his Senate seat in January. Preston was one of a battery of White eulogists who spoke to an audience of about "one hundred and fifty," consisting principally of members of Congress. One observer wrote, "The rich chandeliers threw a blaze of light over the extensive room, which was tastefully decorated with evergreens, and wine gushed forth from the bottle, and mirth from the heart." On the platform with Preston, the presiding officer, were Clay, White, Biddle, Governor John Davis of Massachusetts, and Tom Corwin of Ohio.

The theme was ideal for Preston, the first of the Whig

<sup>46</sup>Allan Nevins (ed.), The Diary of Philip Hone, 2 vols. (New York, 1928), I, 457-459.

<sup>47</sup>Preston to White, Washington, D. C., February 10, 1840, Hugh Lawson White Papers, Library of Congress.

orators to speak. He was to do honor to his sixty-seven-year-old friend and colleague, who had resigned his seat rather than obey the "instructions" of his state and desert his principles. What Preston said is stamped with his strong empathic response to a situation similar to his own. Preston praised White's virtues and abilities as a man, and his accomplishments as a public figure, but he also sent his poisoned darts at Calhoun and the "power and patronage party." Near the close of his brief address, he declared of White:

He quitted the palace for his principles. He did not believe that a palace sanctifies what without its walls was reprehensible. He was of sterner stuff than to "crook the pregnant hinges of the knee," where "thrift might follow fawning." With a noble self-sacrifice he pursued the steady tenor of his principles wherever they led him. . . .<sup>48</sup>

Preston's short speech, interlarded with literary allusions, was pronounced by the Knoxville Times an oration of "finished style."<sup>49</sup>

During the waning months of the session Preston continued to harass the Benton-Calhoun combination in running debates on various administration bills, giving his major attention to certain financial measures. One effort was prompted by a resolution submitted by Buchanan on February 26, proposing that the Constitution be amended to "secure a larger specie basis" for the circulation of "the country's money" by prohibiting the issue of small bank notes by the states. Preston opposed the bill chiefly, he claimed, because he believed it "extra-constitutional." Specifically, he objected that the power of

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<sup>48</sup>Nancy Scott (ed.), A Memoir of Hugh Lawson White (Philadelphia, 1856), 395-396.

<sup>49</sup>Knoxville Times, quoted, ibid., 397.

"restraining" the circulation of state bank notes was "reserved to the states." If the bill proposed "an original question" of whether the power of regulating the currency should be given to the federal government or to the states, he should be disposed to withhold such power from the government "while it was under the control of the present party in power."<sup>50</sup> Preston also opposed the bill to establish various additional branches of the United States mint. The bill came up for its third reading on April 17, and Preston moved to recommit it "with instructions to inquire into the expediency of abolishing or suspending the various branch mints." A debate ensued on the motion in which Preston and Clay advocated the recommitment. Preston first reviewed the arguments that had been put forth in the debates of March, 1835, in favor of establishment of the mints. The leading one had been that these mints would greatly increase gold production. But this argument had proved unsound, for the "ratio of production" had decreased. The gold mines from the Rappahannock to Georgia had decreased in production, and many had been abandoned. Georgia had found, for example, that labor could be more profitably employed in agriculture than in mining. The "experiment" had been unsuccessful, and Preston thought it wise to discontinue the branch mints. The question on recommitment was decided in the negative by a vote of 27 to 11.<sup>51</sup>

From May 4 to October 22, Preston was "abroad in the land"

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<sup>50</sup>Cong. Globe, 26th Cong., 1st Sess., 224, and Appendix, 218-221.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 235, and Appendix, 316.

championing from the "stump" the candidacy of Harrison and Tyler. He addressed large partisan audiences in New York, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Virginia, and Georgia, delivering a total of at least fourteen campaign addresses.<sup>52</sup>

While Preston's stock continued to drop in South Carolina where the Calhoun press lashed him unmercifully for his pro-Whig activities, his political fortunes soared outside the state as a result of his untiring rhetorical crusade for Harrison. The Whigs were victorious and Preston was among the Harrison champions considered for a cabinet post. According to one source, Preston's name was presented to Harrison "by most of the Whigs of the South, for the Navy department." At the same time it was affirmed that Preston "did not desire the appointment," and would not accept it unless it were "tendered under such circumstances as would have left him no wish to refuse it." This was true in spite of the fact that good friends wished that Preston be tendered the cabinet post "that he might thus have an opportunity of putting down the only imputation with which malice had even touched his name--the desire of office."<sup>53</sup>

At the height of the speculation on what figures would form Harrison's cabinet, the Washington correspondent of the Charleston Courier wrote that Preston's chances of receiving an appointive office were extremely favorable, since he held "a strong grasp upon the affections" of the Whig leaders, and had earned a "pre-eminent"

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<sup>52</sup>Gunderson, "A Political and Rhetorical Study of the 1840 Presidential Campaign," loc. cit., 492.

<sup>53</sup>Thompson to Tyler, Mexico, January 30, 1843, quoted in Tyler, Letters and Times of the Tylers, II, 17.



standing "with the people."<sup>54</sup> Evidently the Navy Department was "urged upon" Preston, but he declined,<sup>55</sup> and George E. Badger of North Carolina was assigned to the post.

Unfortunately for Preston, he had to choose between his Senate seat and a cabinet office. The reason may be that the Whig leaders discerned that the Senate vote on Clay's land bill "would come to a tie" if Preston were taken from the Senate, and that Tyler's vote then would become the deciding vote. An emissary was sent by certain Whig leaders to learn Tyler's position on the bank bill, and was informed that the vice-president elect would vote against it. Preston was counseled, therefore, to retain his Senate seat. Preston then "authorized a friend" to inform Harrison that he did not wish to be tendered a cabinet post.<sup>56</sup>

Congress convened in December, 1840, for the final session under Van Buren, and Preston found his senatorial role materially altered. Instead of resuming the old opposition fight, he now was to have the opportunity of championing the Whig legislative program. Clay, the opposition whip, assumed that Harrison's victory gave him license to advance his own legislative program. Accordingly, he proceeded to

<sup>54</sup>Charleston Courier, quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, February 17, 1841.

<sup>55</sup>Barnard E. Bee, Mexican Charge de Affaires, to A. S. Lipscomb, Washington, D. C., January 12, 1841, quoted in Garrison (ed.), Texas Diplomatic Correspondence, II, 475.

<sup>56</sup>Thompson to Tyler, Mexico, January 30, 1843, quoted in Tyler, Letters and Times of the Tylers, II, 12. The Columbia Southern Chronicle announced on February 3 that Preston would "remain in the Senate for the purpose of giving his aid to the new Administration in carrying out their measures."



lay his favorite measures before the Senate, hoping to make "Whig preferences a matter of record in advance of any declaration by Harrison."<sup>57</sup> Preston, however, found it impossible to yield his wholehearted support to Clay's consolidationist program.

On January 8, 1841, Clay's leading measure was brought out, when Crittenden moved that the bill to grant pre-emption rights to settlers on the public lands be recommitted with instructions to report the following amendment to the bill: "to distribute the proceeds of the sales of the public lands among the several states of the Union in just and equitable proportions."<sup>58</sup> In January Calhoun, who held that a distribution of revenue "among the members of a confederacy could . . . destroy the federal relationship," moved to amend the amendment by substituting "a bill to cede the public lands to the States in which they lie, on certain conditions."<sup>59</sup> The object of Calhoun's amendment was to dispose of all the public lands lying in the states of Alabama, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, Arkansas, Illinois, Michigan, and Indiana under the "condition" that these states pay annually to the United States sixty-five per cent of the gross proceeds of their land sales.<sup>60</sup>

Two days later, Preston took the floor and "submitted his views at much length in opposition to the amendment," in what

<sup>57</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Sectionalist, 27-28.

<sup>58</sup>Cong. Globe, 26th Cong., 2nd Sess., 90-91.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>60</sup>See Calhoun's "Speech on the Pre-Emption Bill," ibid., Appendix, 52-56.

constituted his only "full-dress" speech of the short session.<sup>61</sup> In his long introduction, Preston explained that his views on the land question had changed. Possession of the extensive public domain had been, he once believed, a "prolific source of executive patronage," and he had desired to see it cut off. But he was happy to discover that he had been "mistaken" about the extent of the evil. The "free spirit and bold independence of the new states," he declared, had been demonstrated in the late election of Harrison. Five out of nine of the "landed states" had "ranged themselves against the existing Administration, in spite of its patronage. . . ."

Preston next turned to his case against the Calhoun amendment. He patterned his argument carefully. First, he developed the fundamental "principles" by which he believed the lands of the public domain should be controlled. Second, he applied these principles to Calhoun's amendment, thus evolving his leading objections to the amendment.

In a style strangely barren, Preston reasoned his way to the general principles, which were: (1) Congress possesses the constitutional power to regulate the public domain; (2) precedent establishes that cessions of public land by the states to the general government be regarded as a "trust fund," to be placed in the hands of Congress; (3) this general fund Congress is bound to administer "in a spirit at once of liberality toward the new states, of just economy as regards our Treasury, and of mere policy as regards the general good of our Union."

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<sup>61</sup>Text of speech taken from ibid., Appendix, 61-64.

Preston next proceeded to "the application of these general principles to the amendment." In the first place, Calhoun's amendment would destroy the "trust" by "giving out of the Treasury, to a few favored states" thirty-five per cent of "many millions of dollars collected from the other states." Congress had no constitutional right to destroy the trust. His next objection was that the Calhoun measure was "unequal" in its operation. The public land within these "favored states" was to be ceded, not to individuals, but to states. He then illustrated by example the inequality that would result. Arkansas would get two hundred and fifteen acres to each inhabitant; Ohio, one-third of one acre. Virginia, which had made large cessions of public land for the "benefit of all," was to get nothing. The bill, he concluded, proposes "enormous" inequalities. Preston objected further that the bill would establish an unfortunate relation of debtor and creditor between the favored states and the general government. If the states could not, or would not, pay, the government could hardly force them to pay. It was well known that the government had been unable to enforce its contract with individual "squatters." And yet the bill proposed to "drive the states" by the Judiciary. Finally, Preston protested that with a national debt of "fifteen millions," it was hardly wise to give away "any portion" of the federal income.

Preston's was one of the most reasonable statements of the weaknesses of Calhoun's amendment. Depending almost entirely upon logical demonstration, he avoided the studied emotional flight and worked also for simplicity and clarity in composition. Evidently, too, he reinforced his ideas through effective vocal and bodily

control. John Quincy Adams wrote of the effort, "I heard Preston for about an hour, and think him the most accomplished orator now in the House. Oh for his elocution!"<sup>62</sup>

Calhoun's amendment failed on January 19 by a vote of 22 to 19,<sup>63</sup> and the record shows Preston voted with Clay. Clay's land bill also failed, for the Kentuckian's forces were yet thin. But Clay's aim, at least thought Calhoun, was to push forward most of his leading measures during the short session "in order to prepare the way for a national bank; the repeal of the Sub-Treasury, the distribution of the proceeds of public lands, & c. . . ."<sup>64</sup>

Clay's opportunity came in the extra session of Congress, called by the new president to meet on May 31. Exactly one month following his inauguration Harrison died, and on April 6 John Tyler took the oath as President of the United States. Tyler, pressed by both parties, chose an equivocal position, and in his message to Congress delivered on June 1, 1841, left open an escape hatch on the controversial bank issue, declaring the necessity for some type of "fiscal agent, capable of adding increased facilities in the collection and disbursement of the public revenues."<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup>Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, X, 395.

<sup>63</sup>Cong. Globe, 26th Cong., 2nd Sess., 112. Preston's speech bears evidence of the strained relationship between him and Calhoun. Throughout the address he referred to Calhoun not by the usual "my colleague," but by the more formal "the senator," or "the senator from South Carolina."

<sup>64</sup>"Calhoun Correspondence," loc. cit., 472.

<sup>65</sup>Tyler, Letters and Times of the Tylers, II, 23-24; Cong. Globe, 27th Cong., 1st Sess., 8, and Appendix, 6.

Meanwhile, Preston's role in the impending fight on the bank question was perceived in all quarters as a crucial one. Not the last to discern his plight was Calhoun, who wrote in February that in the close division of the Senate, "it is not improbable, that Preston will have the casting vote on the bank, and, if so, I fear it will be carried."<sup>66</sup> Keenly alive to the critical nature of his position, Preston sought to equip himself by engaging in a searching analysis of the bank question. To the Governor of Massachusetts, John Davis, he addressed a lengthy letter, in which he declared, "Upon the bank question my vote is like [Iy] to be the controlling vote . . . and I wish it therefore to be as well informed as I can make it." Thus, he wished to know whether in Davis' judgment, "anything short of a U. S. Bank can restore order and efficiency, and if anything, what?" Preston's "own inclination of mind," he wrote, had "always been to make a bona fide experiment of the State banks, applying to certain of them selected for that purpose some of the provisions of the charter of the late U. S. Bank."<sup>67</sup>

The overbearing pro-Calhoun editors of the state were not at all disposed to let pass an opportunity to intimidate Preston. Ironically, on the same day that Preston made his earnest solicitation to Davis, the editor of Calhoun's Columbia organ came out in a presumptuous editorial.

We honestly and firmly believe he will [Vote for the United States Bank]<sup>7</sup>. Will he indeed stoop so low

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<sup>66</sup>"Calhoun Correspondence," *loc. cit.*, 476.

<sup>67</sup>Preston to Davis, Charleston, S. C., March 25, 1841, William Campbell Preston Papers.



as to violate his open and solemn pledge against a Bank, and fling this deadly arrow as he flies, into the bosom of the very State that has honored and cherished him?

In his eagerness to dragoon Preston, the editor of the South Carolinian overlooked certain qualifying statements Preston had shrewdly placed in his letter of September, 1838, to his Richland constituents.

Preston's remarks on the bank question could hardly be termed with fairness "an open and solemn pledge against a Bank."<sup>68</sup>

At Calhoun's request, doubtless, the South Carolinian urged an "Extra Session of the Legislature" to "devise measures" to block the passage of the bank bill. Preston wrote, "Mr. Calhoun has issued orders for public meetings throughout the State to instruct me against the bank--and it is even proposed to call an extra session of the legislature for the same purpose." Early in May Preston wrote again that the Calhoun movement had failed "partly from the lassitude of the public mind and partly from the change in the aspect of affairs produced by Tyler's accession."<sup>69</sup> Evidently only two anti-Preston meetings were held. Through W. B. Seabrook, Calhoun managed to have one meeting called in St. Johns, Colleton District, which sent a query

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<sup>68</sup>Columbia South Carolinian, March 25, 1841. In his letter to his Richland constituents, read at the Elmore barbecue in September, 1838, Preston actually said: "You say that the gentlemen whom you represent are opposed to the establishment of a National Bank. I concur with them, Sir. I believe such an institution, under present circumstances, inexpedient and impracticable, nor do I believe its establishment will ever be otherwise, unless the destructive principles of the ruling party continue so to harass the country that it will be driven to escape from anarchy at the risk of despotism." This was a "solemn pledge" to vote against the Bank, declared the South Carolinian. Thus, it concluded: "Where are now the thunders of his /Preston's/ eloquence, while the enemy is approaching? Has Demosthenes a cold?"

<sup>69</sup>Preston to Mangum, Columbia, S. C., March 28, May 3, Willie Person Mangum Papers.



to Preston to ascertain his attitude toward the proposed bank. In his answer, carried by the Columbia Southern Chronicle, Preston wisely declined to commit himself without knowing what provisions the bill would contain. At the same time, however, he declared that he believed, like the late Harrison, that a national bank would be unconstitutional, "save in the event the powers granted to Congress could not be carried into effect without resorting to such an institution."<sup>70</sup> Another meeting at Abbeville censured Preston's "pro-bank" attitude in a set of magisterial resolutions. Preston promptly entered a point-by-point refutation of the charges. It was "not the fact," he argued (1) that "the Whig party had any object known to him and not publicly avowed"; (2) that "in any just meaning of the phrase" the Whig party came in as "the high Tariff party"; (3) that he was elected Senator "as an opponent on Constitutional grounds of a National Bank or a distribution of the proceeds of public lands." For "neither of these questions were . . . thought of in the State at the period of . . . his election." He went on to recall that his election to the Senate was largely the result of his "opposition to the men and measures of the Jackson-Van Buren Administration." The only doubt "thrown upon his re-election" in 1836, moreover, was that he "might relax" in his efforts "to prostrate the Tariff party." The "shafts" of the Abbeville resolutions were, he remarked further, "a matter of regret" to him. The "tenor" of his life, he hoped, had put him "beyond the reach

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<sup>70</sup>Preston to Joseph E. Jenkins, Chairman of the Colleton Meeting, Columbia, S. C., April 14, 1841, quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, April 28, 1841.

of such shafts." Concluding his public defense of his political record, Preston reminded his critics:

If I had been ambitious, the party in power at the moment of its ascendancy, was accessible when I might have chosen it rather than the doubtful . . . cause of the country. If the allurements of popularity, of that dearest popularity which is found at home, could have seduced me from the rough and thorny way of duty, the primrose path was straight before me. If I was servile, I might have surrendered my conscience to the keeping of others and been safe. If I had been venal I might have joined the spoils party.

He had, he declared, "crossed no material opinion once entertained"; had denounced no principle "once avowed," and "avowed none once denounced"; and had "deserted from or to no party."<sup>71</sup>

Subsequent to Preston's letter the pro-Calhoun press relaxed its assault, but Preston continued to refuse to declare against the Bank without knowing what the nature of the bill would be. He dreaded the issue, however, writing that it was "very distasteful" to him, and that he wished the "cup could be passed by."<sup>72</sup>

When the special session convened on May 31, the Whigs were able to control the Senate organization; Preston not only received a place on the Foreign Relations Committee, but was also voted chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs.<sup>73</sup> The expected battle on the

<sup>71</sup>Preston to Benjamin Y. Martin, Chairman of the Abbeville Meeting, Columbia, May 11, 1841, quoted, *ibid.*, May 12, 1841.

<sup>72</sup>Preston to Mangum, Columbia, S. C., May 3, 1841. Willie Person Mangum Papers.

<sup>73</sup>The result of the balloting on the Committee on Military Affairs was: Preston, 25 votes; Benton, 13 votes; Samuel S. Prentiss, 1 vote. Cong. Globe, 27th Cong., 1st Sess., 11.

bank question began to take shape early in the session when Clay pushed forward his "American System" program. His plan for solving the nation's fiscal problems was a "thoroughgoing national bank in the most comprehensive sense." Tyler's plan was a "Fiscal Bank," "to be located in the District of Columbia, where the power of Congress to issue a charter would not be disputed." The Fiscal Bank was also to be empowered to set up branch banks only with the consent of the states in which they were to be located.<sup>74</sup> On July 1, Rives offered an amendment to the Tyler bill requiring the assent of the state legislatures for the establishment of bank branches.<sup>75</sup> Rives addressed the Senate "at great length" in support of his amendment, and was replied to "in full" by Clay, who argued that the people wished "a real old-fashioned National Bank." The Rives amendment, he claimed, proposed to establish "a mere local bank of the District of Columbia."<sup>76</sup> Preston followed Clay in support of Rives' amendment, delivering the only speech of the session which he wrote out for publication for the Congressional Globe.

Preston's short speech was, in essence, an appeal to the Whigs to compromise on the Rives amendment in order to preserve party unity and to solve the government's fiscal problem. He had given the question "all the reflection" which its importance demanded; he believed the Senate should concur in the adoption of the amendment. Preston then

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<sup>74</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Sectionalist, 41-42.

<sup>75</sup>Cong. Globe, 27th Cong., 1st Sess., 133.

<sup>76</sup>Cong. Globe and Appendix, 27th Cong., 1st Sess., 354.

gave a quick review of the history of the question in the course of which he again declared his adherence to the banking system: "Banks, in some form, have become as indispensable to the commercial world as the atmosphere is itself to animal existence." He proceeded next to place in juxtaposition the conflicting Senate proposals, showing the difference between them to be those of "mere detail." He asked, "Will slight grounds justify a difference among those upon whose harmony and upon interests of the highest magnitude depend?" He brought his mind to a "single point" in the dispute: would the "machine be practical?" Rives had shown that it would be, and therefore, for the "sake of harmony and peace," he urged, the Senate should adopt the amendment. The alternative was quite unsavory. Disunity among the Whigs would place "the reins of power" back in the hands of the "spoils party."

Preston next made clear his position on a national bank.

If an institution invested with the powers of the old Bank . . . should be found by experience to be the only expedient by which the essential ends of Government can be attained, let it . . . be adopted. But in the mean time, until this creative necessity shall be invincible and apparent, let us not reject the trial of the same institution, in a modified, and to some, less objectionable form.

Preston put his plea for Whig unity upon one other consideration. Turning his "large blue eyes" upon Clay, the red-haired Preston appealed directly to the man with whom he had chosen to ally himself, urging him to come to the rescue.

Each of us ought not to forget that there are others whose cooperation is not less essential than their own, that something is due to the laudable desire which all must feel to preserve a reputation unimpaired for uniformity in opinion and conduct, and

that every generous, honorable impulse should incline us to appreciate the motive which seeks to preserve the moral power of an untarnished name, and to shun the self-abasement which is often the consequence of variable conduct and inconsistent opinions.

There was something of poignancy in Preston's appeal to Clay to yield his support to the Rives amendment, and thus to allow "the bitter cup" to be "passed by."<sup>77</sup>

Rives' amendment was roundly defeated on July 6 by a vote of 38 to 10. For a time it appeared as if Preston would have to drink the "bitter cup" to the dregs. But Clay, anxious to keep control of the Senate, offered on July 26 a "watered-down" version of the Rives amendment which assumed the assent of a state to the establishment of a branch office of the bank "unless the legislature at its first session following the passage of the act should specifically reject it." The crucial issue evolving out of the debates on Clay's amendment was whether the federal government had the power to establish branch banks within the limits of a state without the state's consent. Preston entered the debate only to say he regarded the amendment as one that "would unite the Whig party in its favor." The amendment was clearly a compromise measure, since it was a concession to those who denied "the power of branching for the Federal Government."

Clay's amendment was brought to a vote on July 27, and Preston was forced to take the "bitter cup." His was the deciding vote, as he had expected. When the roll was called he voted aye to carry the amendment by a single-vote majority. The "cup" was hardly the less bitter because of Clay's concession, for Preston was still

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<sup>77</sup>For the text of the speech, see *ibid.*, 355.



voting for a national bank. Calhoun, of course, voted against the amendment.

While Preston was reeling from the blows of the extra session, certain Virginia and South Carolina friends were endeavoring manfully to help him regain his political legs. In June a writer signing himself "Touchstone," took the Washington Globe to task for its "cowardly and lying allegations" against Preston.<sup>78</sup> Also, the Norfolk Herald praised Preston as "an able and consistent statesman and patriot" who had refused to "bow down and worship the man [Calhoun] of all sorts of principles." It also assailed Calhoun for "trimming his sails . . . to float with the tide of popular sentiment at every turn which promised to favor his own advancement to the Presidency. . . ."<sup>79</sup> The Alexandria Gazette added its voice to condemn South Carolina for "wheeling around" on all occasions to suit Calhoun's wishes. As for Preston:

He has been firm, straight-forward, consistent, He, as was remarked by one of his constituents, can say, with Damon, "I stand a Senator, in the Senate House--unawed by power and resolute in right."<sup>80</sup>

The most ardent attempt to resuscitate Preston was made by a South Carolina writer who signed himself "John Taylor." A series of four letters by him, addressed to Preston, was published by the Charleston Courier in September and October. In the first one

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<sup>78</sup>Washington Madisonian, quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, June 2, 1841.

<sup>79</sup>Norfolk Herald, quoted, ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Alexandria Gazette, quoted, ibid.



Preston was counseled to remain in the Senate until the expiration of his "constitutional term." In the remaining ones "Taylor" re-traced Preston's political course, demonstrating carefully his consistency, and seeking to remove all "unjust imputations" against his character. In closing the fourth and final letter, "Taylor" endeavored to assuage Preston's feelings, suggesting to him that while it was a "misfortune" to differ from his adopted state, he should not forget that "a majority of the people of nineteen of the twenty-six States of the Confederacy" had demonstrated their "gratitude" to him.<sup>81</sup>

All such efforts to bring Preston back from his political downfall proved unsuccessful. Politically, the former Virginian was beyond resuscitation in South Carolina, and the "John Taylor" letters represent the final gasp of the pro-Preston press in the state. The Calhoun editors did not bother to comment on the little elegiac paragraphs of the Chronicle and the Courier. While the "John Taylor" letters were still issuing from the press, Pierce Butler, in a letter to Hammond, styled Preston "the deadeast man" in Congress.<sup>82</sup>

Although Preston's political death was sealed in South Carolina, he remained in the Senate for an additional session. In the political shiftings of the second session of the Twenty-seventh Congress, however, Preston, along with Rives and Tallmadge, found himself "crushed between

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<sup>81</sup>Charleston Courier, quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, September 8, 15, 29, October 6, 1841. The Chronicle, edited by Samuel Weir, was the last newspaper of note in South Carolina to champion Preston's cause. The Telescope suspended publication in 1839, and was replaced in 1840 by Weir's paper.

<sup>82</sup>Quoted in Lander, "The Calhoun-Preston Feud, 1836-1842," loc. cit., 25.

Clayism and Tylerism--being rejected by both." In the development of his legislative program, Tyler pursued an independent course, parting with the Whigs but failing to join the Democrats. Clay, who resigned soon after the session began, continued to retain Whig leadership in the Senate, and his chief objective was "the enactment of a new protective tariff." Tyler, an anti-tariff man, chose neither to "abdicate" to Clay nor to place the Democrats back in power by attempting to defeat the tariff. Instead, he decided to formulate a program designed to create his own party by splitting the Whigs and Democrats.<sup>83</sup>

Clay's campaign in the Senate to "head" Tyler produced a series of bitter debates during the first three months of the session. However, because of "a severe indisposition" which kept him confined for three weeks, Preston's participation in these debates was slight.<sup>84</sup> During his "precarious convalescence" he wrote to John Davis, "For some time past the Senate is a debating club upon certain abstract propositions concerning the tariff, the veto, &c&c. Every day someone delivers a lecture as noxious as a twice told tale vexing the dull ear of a drowsy [sic] man--certainly in my case of a sick man."<sup>85</sup> Before his illness, however, Preston decamped in order to speak against Clay's resolution to abolish the veto power of the president.

<sup>83</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Sectionalist, 74-82; Preston to John Davis, Washington, D. C., March 19, 1842. William Campbell Preston Papers.

<sup>84</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, March 9, 1842.

<sup>85</sup>Preston to John Davis, Washington, D. C., March 19, 1842. William Campbell Preston Papers.

After Clay had spoken, Preston took the floor, and "without any special preparation,"<sup>86</sup> spoke "for about an hour" in reply to Clay.<sup>87</sup> Preston's argument, as reported in the Congressional Globe, was a closely-reasoned case against the proposed amendment to the constitution. Springing from the premise that "Usurpation begins with Congress naturally and essentially," he contended in essence that the veto power was the "conservative power" of the constitution, wisely inserted by the framers to "prevent congressional usurpations." Taking a strict state rights view, he argued that the President was the "proper exponent" of the will of the people, since he was not elected with regard to any particular section. On the other hand, the legislative branch was "constituted with reference to State distinctions." The "smaller states," he went on, "could not continue as a Union," were it not for the veto "check."<sup>88</sup>

When the red-haired Preston returned to his seat, the "crowded galleries" burst into applause. The Washington correspondent of the Columbia Southern Chronicle recorded that "Everyone almost has remarked that . . . /It/ was the most successful he has made for some time."<sup>89</sup> The Courier's correspondent in Washington thought the address revealed Preston as "superior to Henry Clay in all the graces of eloquence. . . ."<sup>90</sup>

<sup>86</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, February 2, 1842.

<sup>87</sup>Niles' National Register, LXI (January 29, 1842), 349.

<sup>88</sup>Cong. Globe, 27th Cong., 2nd Sess., 166-167.

<sup>89</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, February 2, 1842.

<sup>90</sup>Charleston Courier, January 28, 1842.

Preston continued to address himself to partisan issues during the session as health and inclination directed. As the difficulty of maintaining an independent position increased, however, he channeled his energies more to projects of a cultural flavor. Preston introduced a resolution providing that a joint committee of six members be appointed "to arrange the placing of the statue of Washington in the rotundo [of the Senate], and to direct the details of the pedestal." In support of his resolution, which passed unanimously, he praised the project of a statue as "a noble work, worthy of the national gratitude," declaring that the "general conception" of it possessed a "sublimity almost awful." He wished the statue to be displayed so that "all the accompaniments and incidents" should "conform to and illustrate it."<sup>91</sup>

Most absorbing to Preston was a bill providing for an international copyright law, with which he had been identified since the Twenty-fourth Congress. On February 22, 1837, Clay reported an "address" signed by fifty-six British authors asking copyright protection in the United States. The address was referred to a special committee consisting of Clay as chairman, Preston, Webster, Buchanan, and Ewing. The committee reported favorably, asserting that literary property deserved equal protection with other types, and offered a bill "extending copyright to British and French authors for works thereafter published. . . ." But the bill never came to a vote, though reintroduced by Clay at successive sessions. On March 30, 1842, the day before his retirement, Clay again opened the question by presenting a petition on copyright from a group of American authors, among

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<sup>91</sup>Cong. Globe, 27th Cong., 2nd Sess., 48.

whom was Washington Irving. Clay expressed his desire that the Senate would not allow the opposition of two prominent Eastern publishing houses to prevent the passage of a copyright law. The petition was then referred to the Committee on the Judiciary.<sup>92</sup>

Preston's interest in this measure, which sought to promote the progress of the arts and sciences, dated back to a conversation in Ireland with Anne Grant of Laggan. Evidently, too, he discussed the question with Irving during the walking tour of Scotland. As a member of the select committee, Preston armed himself with arguments to be used in debate, writing to his old friend Irving to solicit his thinking on the problem. The bill never came to debate. In 1840 when its passage at last looked favorable, Preston refreshed himself on the question and delved deeper into the whole problem. His old friend Francis Lieber supplied him with additional materials for debate, addressing to him a lengthy essay in which he formulated his "theory of property in literature." To inform public opinion and to generate sentiment in favor of a copyright law, Preston had the essay published, and suggested that Lieber immediately send copies of it to the "influential members of the [Senate] Library Committee." "From New Orleans to Boston to Berlin, the pamphlet created comment and helped revive waning interest in the copyright."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, February 25, 1837; R. R. Bowker, Copyright: Its History and Its Law (Boston, 1912), 341-346; Thorvald Solberg, "The Development of International Copyright Relations Between the United States and Foreign Countries," Copyright Miscellany No. 13 (Boston, 1939), 2-3; Cong. Globe, 27th Cong., 2nd Sess., 370.

<sup>93</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 36; George S. Hellman, Washington Irving, Esquire. (New York, 1925), 100; Preston to Lieber, Washington, D. C., 7/, 1840, Francis Lieber Papers,

Once more debate on the bill failed to materialise, but in 1842 when Clay reintroduced it, Preston felt that its passage was certain. He discussed the question fully with Irving in Washington before the latter embarked on a trip to Spain, and wrote hopefully to Lieber that Irving had been in Washington and had "made a decided impression upon the copyright problem."<sup>94</sup>

Preston's hopes soon crumbled. On May 11 he inquired of the chairman of the Judiciary Committee "what had become of the copyright bill" which had been referred to the committee "four months ago." Berrien of Georgia, chairman of the committee, informed Preston that the committee was ready to report adversely "two months ago" but had been told by Clay to withhold the report and to gather "further testimony." Thus ended Preston's hopes of getting a copyright law enacted before he left the Senate. Although he had never been able to bring his rhetorical powers to bear on the question in Senate debate, he had been indefatigable in keeping himself informed on it in readiness for debate, and in publicising the question. One Irving biographer has observed that "the world of letters should be grateful to him for his services in the initial stages of international copyright, a subject in which he was perhaps the first to interest Irving."<sup>95</sup>

Despite his wife's and his own failing health, Preston labored

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Huntington Library; Frank Friedel, Francis Lieber: A Nineteenth Century Liberal (Baton Rouge, 1947), 188.

<sup>94</sup>Preston to Lieber, Washington, D. C., March 20, 1842, Francis Lieber Papers.

<sup>95</sup>Cong. Globe, 27th Cong., 2nd Sess., 487; Hellman, Washington Irving, 100.



through his last session of Congress. But to various correspondents he confided his disappointment in the accomplishments of the session. To Clay he exclaimed in June, "God preserve us, for our condition is most sad," and after the session was over he wrote to Davis, "We are wearied and worn and without the consolation of having done well for the country."<sup>96</sup>

In November of 1842 Preston sent to both houses of the South Carolina legislature a formal resignation of his Senate seat, thus bringing to an official close his fourteen strenuous years of political life. Although he was now a political corpse in South Carolina, he could take a measure of consolation in the expressions of commendation which came to his Columbia mailbox from numerous out-of-state friends. Webster, now Secretary of State, wrote to him, "Your career in the Senate has been long, useful, and splendid; and I believe you leave Congress with the respect and good wishes of all its members."<sup>97</sup> General Winfield Scott in a long letter urged, "But, my dear Colonel, you must return. . . . There can be no Senate without you, & no life & joy in private circles. . . . Curse upon Calhoun. . . . He has killed the chivalry of the state."<sup>98</sup>

On local soil many of Preston's former "warmest" friends

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<sup>96</sup>Preston to Clay, Washington, D. C., June, 1842, Henry Clay Papers, Library of Congress; Preston to John Davis, Washington, D. C., August 4, 1842, William Campbell Preston Papers.

<sup>97</sup>Webster to Preston, Washington, D. C., n.d., quoted in Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 140-141.

<sup>98</sup>Scott to Preston, Washington, D. C., October 18, 1842, William Campbell Preston Papers.

refused to speak to him because of his estrangement from Calhoun.<sup>99</sup> Preston, still refusing to "pay tribute" to the "Kingdom of Calhoun," wrote that "some of Calhoun's friends have proposed a reconciliation between us but our respective conditions induce me to decline it positively."<sup>100</sup>

Although some of the victims of the Calhoun purge migrated to other states to fill distinguished positions, Preston chose to lead the life of a private citizen in Columbia, where he attempted to pick up the scattered pieces of his old law practice.<sup>101</sup> He was soon again focusing with earnestness upon juristic address. In its parting tribute to Preston the Southern Chronicle reported that he took the defense of four Negroes charged with the murder of a Richland white man, "without fee or reward." The report went on to say that Preston advocated the Negroes' claims

in a speech of about half an hour's length, while a large concourse of citizens, with eager attention and breathless silence, listened to the well-known tones of his mellow voice, and gratefully recognized him as the same philanthropic individual, who, in days of yore, had pleaded many a poor man's cause, at the same bar, without fee or reward.

The loyal editor of the Chronicle concluded, "Far more true joy Marcellus exiled feels, / Than Caesar with a Senate at his heels."<sup>102</sup>

Preston's attempt to lead South Carolina into Whiggism failed completely, and with his resignation Calhoun secured for the state the

<sup>99</sup>Margaret L. Coit, John C. Calhoun (Boston, 1950), 446.

<sup>100</sup>Preston to Thompson, August 29, 1842, Waddy Thompson Papers.

<sup>101</sup>Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 475; O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 534.

<sup>102</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, December 28, 1842.

political unity he had so long desired. Preston's political downfall was chiefly the result of the interplay of his own character and personality and the political and social attitudes of the state. His character was such that he could not make obeisance to Calhoun and surrender his own judgment to that of the senior senator. Unlike Calhoun, he lacked certain important qualities of leadership. Much too non-committal for the South Carolina palate, he wrought his own overthrow to some extent by failing to announce his position promptly. At times he seemed unable to make a quick and final decision. Significant evidence indicates that he dreaded the eruptions of the Calhoun press and the siege guns of the Rhett-Elmore clique. Too, he lacked the organizing abilities of Calhoun, who continued to keep his forces well-drilled by giving careful attention to political leadership and to newspaper backing. At no time during the six-year struggle with Calhoun did Preston have the support of more than three leading state newspapers. The Courier, the Telescope, and, later, the Southern Chronicle, proved no match for Calhoun's press, which included a number of influential state papers as well as the Washington Reformer. And with uncanny ingenuity the pro-Calhoun editors exploited Preston's tendency to keep quiet on his position, charging him with failure to play "an open South Carolina game." Calhoun's clever editors also exploited to the fullest the imputation that Preston was driven by an unhealthy ambition, while at the same time inculcating the belief that Calhoun's course was one of pure self-sacrifice. An over-sharp appetite for political preferment was fatal in the South Carolina of the 1830's.

Finally, Preston's collapse was also affected by his political philosophy. As his speeches and voting record show, he became a political hybrid, unable to give unreserved endorsement to either a strict state rights philosophy or to simon-pure consolidationism. Just as he could not bring himself to support the Sub-Treasury with Calhoun in 1837, so also he could not conscientiously vote for Clay's protective tariff bill in 1842. Essentially conservative, he believed in so limiting the powers of the government as to preclude infringement on individual liberties. Yet he also saw merit in Clay's "American System" and was really never convinced that a national bank was an instrument of consolidation. There was no place for a political hybrid in "the Kingdom of Calhoun" nor for a "friend and follower of Henry Clay."

## CHAPTER X

### STUMP CHAMPION OF HARRISON AND CLAY

The great body of Preston's public utterance falls into the broad category of speaking called motivative address. Judicial and legislative speaking, as earlier shown, embrace an important segment of his rhetorical practice. During his oratorical career, Preston also devoted his energies to another leading form of motivative address, political campaign speaking. While he spoke in a number of canvasses in his own behalf, his oratorical activities in support of the Whig presidential candidates of 1840 and 1844 were the most significant.

In the 1840 campaign, while still a member of the Senate, Preston played a leading part in advocating the cause of Harrison and Tyler before numerous popular assemblies in at least seven states. Again in 1844, as a private citizen of Columbia, he went before the people to urge the election of another Whig presidential candidate, Henry Clay. Preston was one of the foremost Whig champions of the South in the colorful 1840 campaign. In 1844, however, his rhetorical activity was sharply restricted by his own failing health and the lingering illness of his daughter, Sally.

Like many other Southern Whigs, Preston was disappointed that the Harrisburg Convention of December, 1839, eliminated Clay, the favored candidate of the Southern wing of the young party. The Whigs'

logical choice in 1840, Clay had been favored by more delegates at Harrisburg than any other candidate. Because the convention voted by delegations under the unit rule, Harrison became the Whig standard bearer.<sup>1</sup> On the final ballot New York, Michigan, and Vermont swung from General Winfield Scott to Harrison, and Illinois deserted Clay. This gave Harrison a total of 148 votes and reduced Clay's to 90 and Scott's to 16.<sup>2</sup>

Clay's defeat at Harrisburg was chiefly the result of his being considered by many influential Whig leaders as too controversial a figure. Dickey has summed up the leading objections to Clay:

In spite of his long career as a public servant, and notwithstanding his magnetic characteristics, the fact that he was a Freemason militated against him in the East, and his strong protective tariff attitudes handicapped him in at least a part of the South.<sup>3</sup>

Harrison, the sixty-eight-year-old hero of the battle of Tippecanoe, was not handicapped by any major objections, and was a popular military hero--the brand of candidate needed by the Whigs for their 1840 "hurrah" campaign.<sup>4</sup>

Tyler was finally settled upon as the second man on the Whig ticket as an added inducement to the friends of state rights and strict construction.<sup>5</sup> The convention failed in its efforts to unite

57. <sup>1</sup>Arthur C. Cole, The Whig Party in the South (Washington, 1913),

<sup>2</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, December 13, 1839.

<sup>3</sup>Dickey, Seargent S. Prentiss: Whig Orator of the Old South, 170.

352. <sup>4</sup>Dorothy B. Goebel, William Henry Harrison (Indianapolis, 1926),

175. <sup>5</sup>Henry A. Wise, Seven Decades of the Union (Philadelphia, 1881),



"upon some distinguished friend of Mr. Clay as Vice President."

Crittenden, Bell of Tennessee, Owen of North Carolina, Preston, and Leigh of Virginia were all proposed, but each was rejected for one reason or another. Of Preston's elimination the New York Courier and Enquirer declared:

Mr. Preston was . . . proposed, but South Carolina, at least so far as the Whig convention was concerned, was out of the union, and as none of the southern delegates approved of the suggestion, Mr. P. was dropped.<sup>6</sup>

Stalelated, the convention referred the problem to the "Grand Committee" who finally chose Tyler.

Many advantages lay with the Whig party as the active canvass got under way. Corruption in the Van Buren party, coupled with the straitened economic circumstances of the country, had created an intense desire for a change in administration. The Whigs did not bother to draw up a party platform. Indeed, in view of the diversity of creeds and interests composing the party it is unlikely that a platform could have been agreed upon. Wide dissatisfaction with "locofocoism" was alone adequate to start "an avalanche of the people."<sup>7</sup> Besides, in Harrison the Whigs had a candidate calculated to inspire enthusiasm, for he was

the "log cabin" candidate, the man of the people, living its frugal and simple life and cultivating all its virtues, offering hospitality to every passer-by, who found the door open and a glass of cider on the table,

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<sup>6</sup>New York Courier and Enquirer, quoted in Niles' National Register, LXI (December 11, 1841), 233.

<sup>7</sup>Goesel, William Henry Harrison, 345; Freeman Cleaves, Old Tippecanoe: William Henry Harrison and His Time (New York, 1939), 319.

whereas Van Buren inhabited a palace and ate with gold spoons and forks.<sup>8</sup>

The current of public opinion augured well for Whig success.

In addition, the Whigs could scarcely have been blessed with a more impressive array of oratorical talent. The very fact that the party was an amalgam of so many political elements brightened the rhetorical outlook. The Whigs were able to send abroad during the summer and fall of 1840 such orators as Clay, Webster, Prentiss, Corwin, Ewing, Henry A. Wise, Crittenden, Clayton, Rufus Choate, Edward Everett, Preston, Leigh, N. P. Tallmadge, Legare, Waddy Thompson, Henry Wilson, and scores of other able speakers.<sup>9</sup> Yet another advantage lay with the Whig party in that it possessed a position favorable to the use of emotional symbols. The battle song was "Tippecanoe and Tyler too." The motif of the innumerable party meetings held throughout the nation was the log cabin. Sargent recalled of the campaign:

Log cabins large enough to hold crowds of people were built in many places. Small ones, decorated with 'coon-skins were mounted on wheels and used in processions. The use of the 'coon-skins soon led to the adoption of the 'coon . . . itself as an emblem and adjunct of the log cabin, and its "counterfeit presentment" was hoisted in all the Whig papers.

Conventions and barbecues were trimmed with "live eagles perched upon locomotive cabins," barrels of hard cider, representations of "a fight between the 'coon and the fox (the emblem of Van Buren)," and colorful

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<sup>8</sup>M. Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, 2 vols. (New York, 1908), II, 74.

<sup>9</sup>Sargent, Public Men and Events, II, 108; Benjamin Ferley Poore, Ferley's Reminiscences of Sixty Years in the National Metropolis, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1886), I, 234.

banners bearing mottoes.<sup>10</sup>

Realizing the critical nature of the contest, Whig leaders spared no effort to place the aging Harrison in the White House. Preston felt as early as March that Whig chances were good. Clay had "consolidated" the party in favor of "his rival nominee," and the "hurrah" was with the Whigs. But, he added, "Our final destiny is at stake for if Harrison be not elected, the Whigs will never attempt another rally."<sup>11</sup> To Lieber he predicted that if the "current" in favor of the Whigs continued until May, Harrison would be "elected by a very large majority."<sup>12</sup> But he was at the same time apprehensive lest "some contretemps" arise to spoil Harrison's chances.<sup>13</sup>

The field presented by the campaign was well-suited to the exercise of Preston's oratorical abilities. The assignment was to enlist the masses in a crusade against government corruption, and few orators of the campaign were his superior in swaying a popular audience. His abilities to strike the imagination with verbal imagery and to incite the emotions were premium abilities in a campaign of praise and blame. Besides, he possessed, by all accounts, "a commanding mien," fluency of utterance, a fervid delivery, and "the

<sup>10</sup>Sargent, Public Men and Events, II, 108.

<sup>11</sup>Preston to Wilde, Washington, D. C., March 29, 1840, William Campbell Preston Papers.

<sup>12</sup>Id. to Lieber, Washington, D. C., March 1, 1840, Francis Lieber Papers, Huntington Library.

<sup>13</sup>Id. to Legare, Baltimore, March 14, 1840, Chiselm Collection, Microfilm, Caroliniana Library.

histrionic gift.<sup>14</sup> Such indeed were the oratorical arms demanded in the "hurrah" campaign, and the Carolina orator did not hesitate to make full use of them.

Preston began his wide-ranging itinerary in May, traveling first to Baltimore to attend the National Convention of Whig Young Men called to ratify the Harrisburg proceedings. On May 4 a "vast multitude" assembled for the convention at Baltimore's Canton race track, amidst the fluttering banners of twenty-seven excited state delegations. It was doubtless heart-warming to Preston when his own state hoisted a banner bearing the motto "The Palmetto resists oppression."<sup>15</sup> Among the visiting orators on the "monster platform" were Clay, Webster, Preston, Crittenden, Corwin, Millard Fillmore, and Caleb Cushing. After a battery of youthful Whig speakers had appeared, "a call went up" for addresses from the distinguished guest orators, who declined, believing that "their appropriate character was that of spectators and auditors." But the "calls for them were so strong and earnest that they yielded, and one after another, Mr. Clay, Mr. Webster, Mr. Sergeant, Mr. Preston, and Mr. Groves addressed the convention." An abridged account of Preston's remarks was carried in Niles' National Register.<sup>16</sup>

Preston's effort consisted chiefly of eulogistic comment on

<sup>14</sup>Rion, William C. Preston, 6-7; Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men, II, 56; Hulseman, Sur les Principaux Membres du Congrès, 9; Charleston Courier, May 24, 1860; Charleston Mercury, May 24, 1860.

<sup>15</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, May 7, 1840. The Intelligencer noted that "This delegation was loudly cheered whenever the banner of that state appeared. . . ."

<sup>16</sup>Niles' National Register, LVIII (May 9, 1840), 158.

Harrison and Clay, a denunciation of Van Buren, and a plea for Whig unity. His speech, as reported, was chiefly a tissue of bald assertion and emotional appeal. Before an assemblage estimated at between thirty and fifty thousand, he began:

This is the happiest day of my life. I see here the consummation almost of all that I had hoped for from the earliest day I entered public life. I hate tyranny, and from my infancy was taught to despise a tory. I was born a Whig, and am yet a Whig.

Preston next referred to the significance of the occasion. The Whigs, he declared, had "met here" to bring "peace and prosperity to the land." It was his belief, moreover, that Harrison would "maintain and consolidate the great national institutions and enterprises of the country."

Before taking up the virtues of Harrison, however, Preston pronounced a eulogy on Clay. He claimed that Clay's "self-denying magnanimity" and "patriotic conduct" had contributed immeasurably to Whig unity. Speaking of this part of his address, the reporter declared, "The eulogium was the most eloquent we have heard, and the audience heard it with interest and delight."

In his eulogistic remarks on Harrison, Preston first connected the hero of Tippecanoe with the soil, referring to him as "the Ohio farmer." Next, he associated Harrison with the founding fathers and the Anglo-Saxon race. He proudly proclaimed that Harrison was "a Virginian born and a son of a signer of the Declaration of Independence"; also that Harrison sprang from the "best of Anglo-Saxon blood." "He is a descendant of that Harrison who in the reign of the tyrant Charles, said that 'as he was a tyrant I slew him.'" Thus, Preston asked: "Who . . . can boast of better blood in his veins than this descendant



of the king-destroying, despot-killing, tyrant-hating Harrison?" In concluding his commendation of Harrison, Preston used the device made famous by his maternal grand uncle, declaring his personal intention to support the old general: "I will devote to him my labor, my thoughts, my person and my purse." And, in contrast to the good fortune of the Whigs with Harrison as their candidate, the lot of the Democrats was made to appear a sad one.

Alas, poor democrats, farewell, dear loco focos! You have had your day. Every dog has his day! It is necessary Mr. Van Buren, that you should go for diminished wages, and the country says you shall go for diminished wages.

The somewhat corpulent, immaculately-groomed Preston then went on to "draw a happy picture of the 4th of March, 1841." He fancied Van Buren, "the prince of democrats," passing the Canton Race Track in a coach "drawn by four horses." Behind him "comes Amos Kendall," said Preston, "and succeeding him Levi Woodbury with his empty bags, and still behind these worthies the head of the war department, Mr. Poinsett, the author of the system of two hundred thousand militia and thirty-four bloodhounds." The speaker could see them in his "mind's eye," as they "come from Washington--are seen at Fell's Point,--now at Canton--and someone says to the party there is the race course where met the national convention in May."

Finally, Preston, "in a burst of eloquence which electrified his hearers, exhorted them to go into the possession of the administration of the public affairs with clean hands and honest hearts; and first of all to proscribe the system of proscription which has dishonored the country." He ended his appeal with a graphic admonition,



"Let us wash the ermine and purify the seats of government."

Prophecy and melodrama marked Preston's conclusion. In "after time," he believed, "we may be able to say, that the country has a second Washington in the second Harrison." When that day comes, he declared, "I will be content--rest satisfied--leave the field of labor,--and say like one of old, 'now, Lord, letest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen the glory.'"

Few of the huge audience were able to hear what Preston said on this occasion. The Baltimore Sun reported that "The wind blew a perfect gale during the whole time, and it was almost impossible for the greater portion of the dense crowd who thronged around the stands, to hear the orators."<sup>17</sup> The substance of Preston's remarks was given wide dissemination through the pages of Niles' National Register.

On the following day both Clay and Preston again addressed the convention, which assembled for its final session in Monument Square. The Baltimore Eagle reported of Preston's second address: "Mr. Preston . . . was hardly less eloquent than on Monday, and none the less interesting to those who heard him, for many now heard him for the first time." Preston's audience on the second day was considerably smaller, since "thousands" had already left the city.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>The Baltimore Sun, May 5, 1840. Preston felt that the newspaper accounts of his Baltimore speech of May 5 hardly did him justice, for he wrote to Lieber: "You must not judge of my speech . . . by what you saw in the papers. The press blew the chaff far and wide while the grain was left on the spot." Preston to Lieber, Washington, D. C., May 25, 1840, Francis Lieber Papers.

<sup>18</sup>Baltimore Eagle, quoted in Niles' National Register, LXIII (May 9, 1840), 157. Among the orators who spoke on May 5 in Monument Square was Hugh S. Legare, of whom the Eagle wrote: "Few men in the country have more power to interest, and no one has a more brilliant imagination with which to illustrate the good or bad principles of a government."

Preston did not deliver another campaign address until early June, when he accepted a call from the Tippecanoe Club of Alexandria, Virginia. Leaving his seat in the Senate once more, he crossed the Potomac by steamboat to join on June 11, at Alexandria, another array of Whig oratorical talent which included Webster, Crittenden, Wise, Rufus King of Georgia, Thompson of South Carolina, and Nicholas Biddle. The assemblage, according to the Alexandria Gazette, consisted of "several thousand freemen of the District of Columbia and the neighboring counties of Virginia and Maryland," who gathered at 3 p. m., "under and around an immense awning erected on the green" adjacent to Alexandria.<sup>19</sup> The place of meeting, stated the National Intelligencer, was styled "neutral ground in reference to the location in the District of Columbia. But if the ground was neutral there was nothing else neutral in the whole affair."<sup>20</sup> The occasion was calculated to spur the Whig orators to their best efforts. As Webster put it, the object of the Harrison festival at Alexandria was to "commemorate the Whig victories in the spring elections of Virginia," which had been indicative of "how the south would act." The orator of the Bay State planted still more seeds of excitement before he closed, calling upon the "distinguished Southerners present" to testify as to whether he and his "political friends of the north" were not in "friendly" concert with their Southern brothers on the subject of abolition.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Alexandria Gazette, June 15, 1840.

<sup>20</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, June 13, 1840.

<sup>21</sup>Alexandria Gazette, June 15, 1840.

After the stentorian voice of Webster had died away, Crittenden spoke, testifying that Webster, like Southern statesmen, was opposed to the abolitionists. Preston followed Crittenden in response "to a general call from all parts of the ground." According to the Gazette:

His speech was a master-piece of popular eloquence, and was listened to with the most absorbing interest, and manifest delight. He too responded to the appeal of Mr. Webster: and if ever there was a competent witness, surely William C. Preston is one, on this question. A Virginian by birth, a South Carolinian by adoption, a slave-holder, he bore his unequivocal testimony to the honest and devoted opinions of the Massachusetts Senator. . . .<sup>22</sup>

Some insight into the content of Preston's address may be had from the report that

Mr. Preston ridiculed, with surpassing effect, the wretched pretence that the party with which he and the friends around him were associated was leagued with the abolitionists. Who dare assert it? None but the infamous calumniators of those who would at any time drain their dearest veins in defence of the established institutions of the country!<sup>23</sup>

The Whigs' powerful supporter, the Washington National Intelligencer, concluded of the Alexandria festival, "A more magnificent display of eloquence has never been witnessed; but what was as yet a more agreeable feature . . . , nearly half the States and all the sectional interests of the Union were represented by the speakers."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid. It is doubtful that Preston at this time owned any slaves. Certain evidence suggests that he owned a number of slaves before he moved from Virginia to South Carolina. Yet he evidently disposed of them soon after establishing his residence in Columbia in order to raise the money to advance a large down payment on a house. See Preston to Francis Smith Preston, Columbia, December 1, 1823, William C. Preston Papers.

<sup>23</sup>Niles' National Register, LVIII (June 27, 1840), 268.

<sup>24</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, June 13, 1840. While

The Alexandria speech marked the beginning of a grinding itinerary which took Preston into Delaware, New York, New Jersey, then back to Virginia, and finally, to Georgia. Beginning in mid-June, he did not complete it until October 22, only days before the election.

Demands upon Preston increased as early summer came on. Before leaving Washington to fill his first engagement at Wilmington, Delaware, he received a call from the Whigs of Mendon, Massachusetts. He found it impossible to accept the invitation, but sent a letter to his "brothers of the great Whig family" which the Washington National Intelligencer published as "an eloquent and impressive" definition of the "position of the parties that now divide the country."<sup>25</sup>

At Wilmington Preston furthered the Whig cause with two addresses. Accompanied by Crittenden, who also delivered an address, Preston appeared first at a "town meeting" on the evening of June 19 and on the following day he addressed "a country meeting." According to the Delaware Sentinel, both assemblages were "unusually large and respectable," the second meeting "surpassing in numbers, unanimity, and spirit, any one ever before convened in the state." On both occasions Preston and his colleagues "entertained the crowds in

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Preston was occupied with the Whig cause in Virginia, his friend Waddy Thompson was extolling Harrison's virtues at Whig assemblages in Philadelphia, giving speeches on the same day in Independence Square and at the Whig Reading room. Ibid., June 17, 18, 1840.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., August 5, 1840. Preston received another invitation to speak at a dinner given to "the Georgia State Rights Convention" on June 2, but he was also unable to accept this invitation. Columbia Southern Chronicle, July 8, 1840.

attendance for nearly three hours in the delivery of eloquent and satisfactory addresses." Party spirit was at a high pitch when the guest orators departed, for the Sentinel stated that the "peoples' spirit was thoroughly roused, not again to be quieted until the reigning dynasty is at an end."<sup>26</sup>

Preston and Crittenden journeyed up the Hudson River by steamboat, arriving in Poughkeepsie, New York, late in the evening of July 3. Crittenden, after consulting with a number of friends whom he had met, decided to proceed on to Hudson to address a Whig festival the following day. According to the Poughkeepsie Eagle, Preston repaired to the Poughkeepsie Hotel with Tallmadge, "where, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, the people rushed by hundreds to shake hands with the distinguished Senators, before retiring for the night."<sup>27</sup>

The Fourth dawned "auspiciously" and the processions began streaming in "from Washington, from Amenia, from Fishkill, from Hyde Park, from Pleasant Valley, and from almost every other place in Dutchess County." Like the "swarms of locusts in Egypt" they came, reported one Poughkeepsie paper. Exercises were opened at 11:30 in the morning on the "west side of College Hill" where a temporary stage had been erected to accomodate the "officers of the day, speakers, and invited guests."<sup>28</sup>

Preston and Wise, the guest orators, were introduced by

<sup>26</sup>Delaware Sentinel, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, June 29, 1840, and in Niles' National Register, LVIII (July 4, 1840), 278.

<sup>27</sup>Poughkeepsie Eagle, July 11, 1840.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.



Tallmadge to an assemblage which, according to the estimate of the Log Cabin, consisted of six thousand.<sup>29</sup> The New York Evening Journal reported that Preston "came forward and spoke for two hours, in a spirit and with an effect which told upon the hearts of all who saw and heard him." The Eagle gave only a rudimentary "report" of Preston's effort, offering the excuse that "to attempt a sketch of it would be doing too much injustice to the splendid effort." The "first part" of Preston's speech included references "to the day, the occasion, and the character and objects of the respective parties," and went on to state that Preston "compared the character and principles of the present Whig party with those of the Whigs of the revolution, and the policy of the present administration with that of Lord North." The "grounds" between the contending parties, Preston averred, were the same "as between the Whigs and Tories of the Revolution, and especially between the British Whigs and Tories."<sup>30</sup>

Preston next loosed "his bitter and cutting irony, his withering sarcasm, and his thundering denunciation" upon the "political policy and arbitrary power" of the administration. The reporter of the Eagle noted that "here . . . [Preston's] splendid powers of oratory shone with a brilliancy that no effort of the imagination in one who has not heard him can conceive of."

After paying tribute to Tallmadge for "abandoning Van Buren,

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<sup>29</sup>The Log Cabin, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, July 8, 1840. The Poughkeepsie Eagle estimated the number present at fifteen thousand.

<sup>30</sup>Poughkeepsie Eagle, July 11, 1840.



and facing the denunciations of the administration, Preston brought his address to a close with assurances that the Whigs would be victorious. The Whigs' prospects were "bright," especially "at the south," he pointed out, "for every southern state except South Carolina, and perhaps Alabama, might be relied upon as certain for Harrison."

During the course of his speech, declared the Eagle reporter, Preston was "repeatedly interrupted by the . . . plaudits of his hearers, and when he had concluded it was some minutes before the enthusiastic cheering was over." Both the Eagle and the New York Evening Journal alluded to Preston's being a descendant of Patrick Henry, and the Columbia Southern Chronicle quoted the latter paper as saying that those who heard the Carolina orator were able to listen to the "sentiments, principles, and admonitions of Patrick Henry speaking through his gifted, devoted, impassioned 'lineal descendant.'"<sup>31</sup>

From Poughkeepsie Preston proceeded to New York City to fill an engagement on July 6 at Masonic Hall. Commenting on the speech and the occasion, a correspondent of the Washington National Intelligencer wrote:

Mr. Preston made a glorious speech at Masonic Hall last night to as large an assemblage of Whigs as the walls of that great building could contain. He spoke about two hours, and though the heat in the closely crowded hall was almost suffocating, his hearers manifested no uneasiness, but would have listened with delight for two hours longer. He commented with great severity on the measures of the Administration, and with good effect.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.; New York Evening Journal, quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, July 23, 1840.

<sup>32</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, July 9, 1840.

On the following afternoon Preston left New York for Elizabethtown, New Jersey, to fill another speaking appointment. From Newark, Preston hurried by rail, arriving at Elizabethtown on the afternoon of July 7, where he was announced by "a discharge of cannon" and greeted with "enthusiastic cheers." The visiting Southerner was conducted immediately by members of the Tippecanoe club through a heavy drizzle to "a very large building erected for a coach manufactory." A waiting crowd surged into the building, reported the New York Commercial Advertiser, and soon crowded it "almost to suffocation." The meeting was then adjourned to a "field outside the building," despite the "continued rain."<sup>33</sup>

When Preston rose to address the drenched assemblage of "7,000 or 8,000,"<sup>34</sup> the "shades of night were darkening the sombre skies with deeper gloom." Lights were "called for as Preston began his address," and, according to the Commercial Advertiser's account, "the stage was forthwith illuminated by an array of flambeaux."<sup>35</sup>

Preston's address on this occasion is of special interest among his 1840 campaign efforts since it was his most completely reported speech. The editor of the New York American took personal charge of the reporting, and in the issue of July 8 presented a lengthy account of the Preston address. Both the National Intelligencer and the Columbia Southern Chronicle also carried the speech,

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<sup>33</sup>New York Commercial Advertiser, July 8, 1840.

<sup>34</sup>New York American, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, July 10, 1840.

<sup>35</sup>New York Commercial Advertiser, July 8, 1840.

reprinting it from the New York American.<sup>36</sup> The character of Preston's audience also contributed to make unique his effort at Elizabethtown, for he addressed an audience of "mostly farmers, assembled from the surrounding country to the distance of fifteen or twenty miles."<sup>37</sup>

Standing under the flickering lights of a cluster of wax torches, Preston spoke for "about two hours," according to one account, "during which period he held his audience as if chained by a spell."<sup>38</sup> The New York American noted that his audience listened with "an interest so strong as even to overcome the disposition to applaud, for fear of losing something."<sup>39</sup>

Preston began with personal references, references to the occasion, and to the surroundings. He first expressed his "deep sense of the kindness and cordiality" with which he had been welcomed. He then referred to his "rapid tour up the noble Hudson," which had been accompanied "by labor." "Hence," he declared, "I appear before you worn down." There were other "obvious disadvantages" attending his effort on this occasion, namely, inclement weather and inadequate lighting. His expression of yet another "disadvantage" elicited an oral response from the huge audience and offered him an opportunity to link himself tactfully with his hearers:

<sup>36</sup>New York American, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, July 10, 1840, and in Columbia Southern Chronicle, August 20, 1840.

<sup>37</sup>New York Commercial Advertiser, July 8, 1840.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>New York American, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, July 10, 1840.

I am a stranger to--(General exclamations of "No, no, you are no stranger.")

I take back the word, exclaimed Mr. P. with energy; I am not a stranger to New Jersey. I have read you in your history. I have heard from the lips of my own ancestors, who stood shoulder to shoulder with yours on your own soil, of the heroism and sufferings of New Jersey; and from the days of my boyhood, I have longed to tread the fields consecrated by so much gallantry and endeared by so many associations.

Continuing to associate himself with his listeners, he pointed out, "I am, too, a citizen of the United States, and therefore no stranger; a Whig, and therefore your brother." This last remark provided a gateway into the speech proper.

Preston employed the distributive method of idea arrangement, dividing his discussion into three general topics: (1) the nature and prospects of the Whig cause; (2) a denunciation of the Van Buren administration; and (3) "A comparison between the two candidates." Within this broad pattern Preston worked, hesitating occasionally to send forth an enkindling appeal.

As a prelude to his characterization of the Whig cause, Preston strove through heightened language and rhetorical questions to render his audience suggestible. Challenging his listeners, he first offered them a moral stimulus for action:

But under what circumstances do we meet? How shall I recur to the gallant deeds of your ancestors, and reconcile your present position with the fact that scarce a field but has been trodden by the foot of Washington--that not a spear of grass but was wet with the blood of your fathers. . . .? How is it that the spirit of those days has not roused you to unanimous opposition to the outrages you have been made to suffer? What did your ancestors fight for? Read the enumeration of the evils and wrongs they rose to avenge, and then ask yourselves if those now inflicted upon you are fewer in amount or less exasperating in character; and yet you are tame.

For his part, the Carolinian was disposed to say, as he quoted Lord Chatham, "while my rights as a member of this Union are violated, I would never lay down my arms, never, never, never." Preston spoke not, however, of the "arms of violence and blood," but of the "arms of the law and the ballot box." If New Jersey Whigs were "earnest in the contest," Preston averred, their "bedraggled flag" would be borne "onward in triumph, even to the dome of the Capitol." Concluding his blood-stirring challenge, he exclaimed:

On, then, Whigs of New Jersey, on, I say, but on whom?  
 (Several voices from the crowd exclaimed "the Tories.")  
 Ay, ay, the Tories! the Tories! Now, as in the days of  
 '76, the opposite of Whig is Tory, and it is the Tories  
 you are to overthrow, as your fathers did!

Preston next characterized the leadership of the Whig party in glowing terms. New Jersey had "gallant leaders" and "brother soldiers" in the political contest. There then followed a series of capsular eulogies on "Harry of the West," the "gallant, magnanimous Harry"; Daniel Webster, leader of the "graver and heavy armed array of the East; and Southard, "your fervid and eloquent son," leader of the Whigs of New Jersey.

But the Whigs possessed yet another advantage. Besides able leadership, they could claim a "holy and exciting cause." In language skillfully adapted to his listeners' background, Preston amplified his declaration.

Think you that any ordinary occasion could have brought me from the sand banks and long-leaved pines of South Carolina to address a New Jersey audience? It is a cause that appeals to us all; that is second to none but the cause of God. It is the cause of the country, of the Constitution, of liberty.



Moving into his attack on the "spoils party," Preston declared: "Time will not allow me to go into an examination of the long, black catalogue of crime which lies at the door of the Administration. . . ." The theme of this section of Preston's address was that the administration had "touched with a paralysis every interest," as though "impelled by the very Genius of Desolation." The leading cause of the nation's distress, Preston charged, was to be found in the "experiments of the Administration upon the industry, manufactures, and mechanic arts of the country. . . ." Keeping his proof materials close to the experiences of his audience, he examined at some length the effects of the "reign of experiments," which, he averred, had brought "adversity to all classes, both rich and poor, the manufacturer of carriages and those who were wont to buy and ride in them."

Completing the development of his charge, Preston paused to seek an audible response from his audience, a large number of whom he evidently could not see under the small arc of torchlight.

Is this picture too darkly shaded? Who is there among you all that has escaped loss or suffering? (None, none, was the reply.) Even so; not one of you. Are there any manufacturers here? (Enough of them; for they have nothing to do at their factories.) Ay, enough indeed; and your democratic friends, who profess so much affection for the hard-handed workman are determined to give you time enough to get your hands soft. Are there laborers here? Their time is now come . . . for the principle of the [administration] party is that the wages of labor are too high.

But the farmer's plight was most distressing of all, the Whig speaker went on. "No presidential election has heretofore been gone into with wheat at 50 cents a bushel and cotton at 6 cents. . . ."

After thus demonstrating the blighting effects of the "reign



of experiments" upon the nation's economy, Preston sent his argument home by drawing a vivid contrast between the "position" of the country before and after the beginning of the "reign of experiments." Calling upon an evocative Biblical allusion, he cried, "Then, all was smiling, happy, prosperous industry. Now, care, suffering, and haggard want. The stately palm tree is withering, its branches dying, and its trunk blasted. We feel that the worm is gnawing at its roots, and that it must soon perish." But, he reminded his former audience, there was "yet time" to "apply the remedy." "You must . . . dig the worm up, and crush it beneath your feet."<sup>40</sup>

The latter statement furnished Preston a springboard for a severe denunciation of "the office holders at Washington," which he clothed in vivid, suggestive diction. Preston's contention was that the policy of the administration was to plunder the resources of the country to support an army of "spoilers." The innumerable office holders in Washington, in the customs houses, and in the post offices, led on by the "Chief Spoiler at Washington," prowled about "stealthily, seeking like the evil one of old, whom they may seduce, whom they may devour."

Preston now sought to arouse the indignation of his listeners by sketching a vivid contrast between the financial condition of the people and that of the "spoilers."

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<sup>40</sup>Cf. Joel 1:12, in which the "withering of the palmtree is mentioned with that of the vine, fig, pomegranate, apple, and other trees, as a sign of the desolation of the land." James Hastings and John A. Selbie, A Dictionary of the Bible, 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1906), II, 657. The "worm" of Preston's allusion probably refers to the "palmerworm" mentioned in Joel 1:4, 12; II:25; and in Amos IV:9.

Their pockets are round and full, while yours are shrunk and lean, and little heed they, or believe they, therefore of the distress which prevails in the land. If the farmer says to one of them that the price of his produce hardly repays the cost of production . . . , the pampered hireling replies that such things will happen and must be submitted to, and admonishes him that resignation is becoming to all mortals.

From Preston's contrast emerged the contention that the office holders' salaries had not been reduced in proportion to the fall in the price of commodities. Since the "spoiler" could "get twice as much for his money as before," it was natural enough for him to "sustain a policy which snatches the dry crust from the hungry lips of the laborer's child, that it may feed the children of your pure democrat with pound cake." After elaborating on the gross injustices of the spoils system, Preston called once more upon a Biblical allusion to send his argument home.

Our condition is worse than that of the Israelites in the desert, for when it rained manna and quails, all could equally hold out their platters. But when the manna of Government falls here, it falls not into your platters. Do any of you catch a quail, or a flake of this manna? Oh! no. Or, if perchance a portion, however small, should fall to one of you, the officer through whose criminal infidelity such a boon should be vouchsafed to a Whig, who was detected in allowing one of the proscribed to taste of this Government manna, would immediately be reported to his Chief, and handed over for trial for the crime of dealing with a Whig!

Indignantly Preston turned upon Van Buren, the "Chief Spoiler," who was largely responsible for "this condition of things." The country, he charged, had been dishonored by "the government of a popinjay, who had done nothing, thought nothing, looked nothing, for its benefit or renown." The oppression under a "gallant old soldier" like Jackson might have had "something redeeming in it," he continued. "But to be

wormed to death! Pshaw!"

Before taking up his last topic, Preston entered a fervent appeal for action, imploring his auditors to "act offensively." "Abandon . . . the defensive, and assault, assault continually. Assault them [the "spoilers"] at all times, in all places. Press onward; you may gain little, but little by little you will gain, and what you gain you will hold."

Preston moved to his last topic, declaring, "And then, gentlemen, as to a comparison between the two candidates, the preference and superiority are all on our side." Harrison, in contrast to Van Buren, was "an honest man." Sarcastically, Preston declared, "Would that, in the many experiments our opponents have proposed, they had at once thought of this one, of trying an honest man." Another reason for supporting Harrison was that he was an able person. As proof of his contention, Preston pointed out that a number of statesmen had concurred in this view. Preston then quickly traced Harrison's career as a civil servant, showing that Washington, John Adams, Jefferson, and Madison each had expressed his confidence in Harrison in assigning him to responsible civil and military posts. Besides, Kentucky had selected Harrison to command her troops "in the darkest hour of war." Quickly availing himself of the opportunity to reply to certain administration newspaper attacks on Harrison, Preston exclaimed, "Yat this is the man whom party malevolence now stigmatizes as a dotard, a coward, a petticoat hero!"

In his peroration Preston, prophesying a Whig victory, sought to lead his audience to feel the righteousness and justice of the Whig

cause. The "current of public opinion," declared Preston, "is running in our favor." To illustrate the "condition" of the two parties, Preston used Herodotus' account of the "harvest of Egypt."

When the mighty river has retired into its narrowest limits, and left a vast waste of mud, upon which the good seed is sown, the swine are turned in upon it, and they tread and root it in, till, in good season, the returning current, rushing back with mighty force, overspreads the waste, and then gradually subsiding, discloses, instead of mud and slime and brutes, a smiling, fertile, and beautiful plain, with the bounteous harvest, and rejoicing the eye and heart of man. The tide of public opinion which is now swelling over the mire and slime . . . will produce like cheering results, for the good seed is here. . . .

After "earnestly" invoking once more the "untiring efforts of all who heard him," Preston thanked the audience "for the patience and indulgence with which they had listened," and concluded by "saying that for himself he was vowed to the contest, until it closed, when, if unsuccessful, such was his position, [that] he would fall, to be no more heard of; if successful, he would only claim to be among the first and most zealous to join in the shouts and gratulations of victory."

The New York American reported that when Preston took his seat "the air was rent with cheers, again and again repeated--which, rising up, as they did, from the bosom of darkness--for the only lights, and they were few, were on the stage, and the vast assembly around was dimly seen--had a most striking and singular effect."<sup>41</sup>

A double rhetorical significance attaches to Preston's

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<sup>41</sup>New York American, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, July 17, 1840.

Elizabethtown speech. Since this speech was the most fully reported of his 1840 stump efforts, it affords a measure of insight into the type of campaign speaking he evidently did in behalf of the Whig cause. In addition, this speech furnishes a reasonably typical example of Preston's rhetorical practice before the popular assemblage. In the absence of more specific data on the composition of Preston's audience, strict appraisal of his speech is hardly possible. Presumably, the audience was intensely partisan. If so, Preston's speech fulfilled admirably the objective of such a campaign effort, for it was calculated above all else to arouse party spirit. Depending chiefly upon emotional devices, Preston associated the Whig cause with moral righteousness and social justice, while at the same time he linked the administration with moral degeneracy and social injustice. He inspired his listeners with hope, yet implored them not to relax in their efforts to achieve a Whig victory. If his audience contained wavering voters, it may be doubted if Preston's speech was designed to capture the independent or the opposition vote, for it was signally wanting in logical forms of support--in evidence and reasoning. He contended often, but he seldom proved, leaning largely upon bald assertion and psychological forms of support.

The Elizabethtown speech also affords a measure of insight into Preston's rhetorical practices as a popular orator. The printed text of the address is replete with indicators of Preston's sensitivity to the need for adapting himself and his materials to the background, beliefs, and interests of his listeners. Throughout his speech, he sought to reveal himself as a person with a good social attitude--as



one who possessed a sympathetic understanding of his audience's way of life, feelings, and problems. He strove to place the issues of the campaign in the context of local conditions. But more than this, he adapted his language to the audience's background, using imagery drawn largely from nature and the Bible, sketching vivid contrasts, setting up dramatic dialogue, and, in general, dramatizing his ideas through a variety of stylistic devices. Again, Preston's awareness of the speaker-audience relationship is revealed in his use of the direct question by which the progress of credence might be assessed through an audible response.

Finally, Preston evidently directed his motive appeals with skill. His direct appeals were made to moral and social duty, love of liberty, and personal security. But he also sought to arouse emotion by the use of evocative diction and illustrations. These various persuasive skills were doubtless influential factors in establishing for Preston a reputation in his own day for effective popular speaking.<sup>42</sup>

Following his Elizabethtown address Preston journeyed southward to his native state of Virginia where he delivered three more addresses before the end of July. His first was at Fredericksburg on July 24 before a Whig festival consisting, according to one estimate, of "at least two thousand persons." Niles' National Register reported that Preston was greeted before 11 a.m. by the "Old Dominion Tippecanoe

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<sup>42</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 290; Wilson, Washington, The Capitol City, I, 294; Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 144; and, Francis Lieber, Quoted in Charleston Courier, May 23, 1860.



Club" at the home of J. S. Wellford, where he "responded in a brief but happy manner." Under "lowering skies," proceedings began at 11:00, when Preston was introduced to the "immense audience" by Col. Hugh Mercer. Of Preston's speech on this occasion, one paper reported:

Mr. Preston addressed the people for two hours and a quarter. It will not be expected that we should give . . . even the slightest sketch of his remarks; and it is surely less to be expected that we should waste words in eulogizing the manner in which he spoke. To say that he addressed the people is equivalent to saying that he spoke with a tact and popular eloquence with which no one else in this land can speak. No one who heard him . . . will ever forget his speech. He was frequently interrupted by the plaudits of the audience, and took his seat amidst the most overwhelming demonstrations of delight and admiration.<sup>43</sup>

Before moving on to Richmond for his next Virginia engagement, Preston returned briefly to Washington, where he addressed an enthusiastic report to Lieber, declaring, "Louisiana . . . is with us. In Virginia too I think the Whig success is won past doubt. In short we are in the highest spirits."<sup>44</sup>

Preston tarried only a short time in Washington before proceeding to Richmond where he spoke on July 23 at the gigantic "Whig Log Cabin." Of the physical setting and the audience, one chronicler recalled:

The Log Cabin, erected for the accomodation of about three thousand persons, was filled to its utmost capacity. Attracted by the great fame of the orator, the wealth, the refinement, and intellect of Virginia's capital here assembled. The learned and distinguished members of the bar and pulpit, and physicians and editors, mingled with the throng, and added ecst and inspiration to the occasion. The rain descended in torrents, and yet hundreds of persons, who were unable to gain admittance within the building,

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<sup>43</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, July 24, 1840.

<sup>44</sup>Preston to Lieber, Washington, D. C., July 19, 1840, Francis Lieber Papers.

remained outside to see and hear what they could between the interstices between the logs. Expectation was aroused to the highest pitch, and when Mr. Preston made his appearance the wildest enthusiasm prevailed. . . .<sup>45</sup>

The same writer gave his impressions of Preston's appearance and powers of delivery on this occasion:

Tall, large, brawny-shouldered, he drew himself up to his full height. His eagle eyes flashed. . . . His powerful, trumpet-toned voice . . . rang out upon the vast assembly in a succession of rapid, startling utterances, that it seemed could emanate from nothing much less than divine inspiration itself.<sup>46</sup>

Preston is reported to have spoken for "two hours and a quarter," but what he said can only be inferred from vituperative accounts of various Democrat papers which indicate that the content of his speech followed closely the pattern of his preceding campaign speeches. Evidently he arraigned the Van Buren administration in severe language, vindicated Harrison from the stigmatizing charges of the Democrat press, and urged the Richmond Whigs to wage an all-out attack on the "power and patronage party."

No other of Preston's 1840 campaign speeches evoked from the Democrat press such a welter of knife-edged paragraphs. The influential Crisis launched the tirade of abuse in an article titled, "Democrats! Stand to your Arms!" Characterizing Preston's effort, the Crisis stated:

It was, from beginning to end, such as might have been expected from the lowest demagogue in the worst days of Greece and Rome. Vulgar anecdote and indiscriminate

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<sup>45</sup>A. S. McRae, quoted in Miller, "William C. Preston, loc. cit. XI (December, 1899), 588.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

abuse was the burden of his song. The hired orators of Philip of Macedon never descended to more gross and palpable outrages on truth and decency, than did Wm. C. Preston in the "Log Cabin. . . ."

The Crisis went on to charge the Carolinian with uttering a treasonable statement. "We charge him with having used language to the effect that, 'if Mr. Van Buren could not be displaced through the ballot box in November next; that if the evils of which he complained could not be removed by an appeal to the polls, he for one was ready to resort to such means as God and nature had put within his reach to force a change.'"<sup>47</sup>

Preston was also brought to book quickly by the influential Washington Globe which used two full columns to heap abuse on the speaker and the speech. Terming Preston "a gorged itinerant raver" and "a ranting Bobadil," the Globe devoted its attention largely to Preston's "treasonable" utterance, and quoted on this point both the Richmond Enquirer and the Crisis. The editor referred to Preston's "sentiment of moral treason" as "a new point in the game of Whiggery," and warned its readers against Whig appeals to "fears, prejudices, lower passions and appetites." Preston, the editor noted further, was the "selected orator to give the cue of intimidation to his party."<sup>48</sup>

The Whig press immediately flew to Preston's defense. The

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<sup>47</sup>The Crisis, July 29, 1840. "We do not blame (or rather can excuse) those," the Crisis continued, "who applauded this sentiment; for Mr. Preston possesses powers of declamation that are well calculated to lead into excesses those who have the least confidence in him, and because we candidly believe when the sentiments he uttered come to be viewed calmly . . . there will not be one who heard him but will condemn the revolutionary doctrines he inculcated."

<sup>48</sup>Washington Globe, August 1, 1840.

Washington National Intelligencer merely termed Preston's speech an "admirable" one,<sup>49</sup> but the Richmond Whig countered the charges of the "collar press." The technique of the Whig was to deny that Preston used the language imputed to him.

Now having listened myself very attentively to Mr. Preston's speech, and having conversed also with many who heard it, I undertake to say, either that Mr. Ritchie [editor of the Richmond Enquirer] misunderstood his informant, or that his informant misapprehended the Orator. Mr. Preston did not use the language imputed to him, but he did say . . . that the wickedness and misrule of the men in power would justify a resort to arms, if our political institutions did not fortunately supply a corrective in the ballot box.<sup>50</sup>

Before leaving the state of his birth, Preston evidently gave another speech at Petersburg, of which the only available notice appeared in the Washington Globe. Referring to this speech, the Globe stated that Preston's "treasonable" utterance at Richmond was "repeated at Petersburg."<sup>51</sup> Of Preston's rhetorical tour through Virginia, one writer recalled, "The old people say that not since the days of his great kinsman, Patrick Henry, had there been anything like the enthusiasm that followed William C. Preston."<sup>52</sup>

Having completed his northern tour, Preston returned to Columbia for a brief period of rest before journeying to Macon, Georgia, to fill his thirteenth engagement of the campaign. Announcing his arrival in

<sup>49</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, July 28, 1840.

<sup>50</sup>Richmond Whig, quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, August 13, 1840.

<sup>51</sup>Washington Globe, August 1, 1840.

<sup>52</sup>Carlisle, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., 183.

Columbia, the Southern Chronicle commented, "The Hon. Wm. C. Preston arrived at his residence in this place, yesterday morning [July 29], in good health and spirits."<sup>53</sup>

Preston's speaking assignment at Macon was perhaps the most auspicious of his 1840 efforts. The Whig leaders of Georgia, headed by John M. Berrian, called upon Preston to attend the Georgia Whig Convention as the leading out-of-state party orator. Preston responded to the Georgia call, helping to kindle enthusiasm in Georgia for Harrison with two addresses.

The Macon convention, which convened on August 13, was attended by "delegations from every county of the state . . . besides many hundreds of persons from other parts of the union."<sup>54</sup> According to the Macon Messenger an "authentic count" placed the number of official delegates at 7,205. Estimates of the total number in attendance range from twelve-to twenty-thousand.<sup>55</sup>

Preston's first address to the Macon convention was delivered shortly after proceedings began "at the Warehouse of Messrs. Hamilton & Reynolds," official convention headquarters. After Berrian was chosen President of the convention, he spoke briefly of "the evil and

<sup>53</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, July 30, 1840.

<sup>54</sup>Macon Journal, quoted in Niles' National Register, LVIII (August 29, 1840), 408.

<sup>55</sup>Macon Messenger, August 20, 1840. Niles stated that "some of the papers say that there were from 18 to 20,000 persons present." The Journal placed the number present at 12,000; the Messenger, at 15,000. The Macon Telegraph, a Democrat paper, offered a depreciatory break-down of the assemblage: "Harrison men, 5,500; Van Buren men, 1,900; Fence men, 600; Boys & Youths, 1,500; Negroes, 1,000; Females of one sort and another, 1,200." The latter classification drew fire from the Messenger, which "repudiated with scorn, the unmanly reflection on the character of our people. . . ."



corrupt action of the present administration. He then "introduced to the attention of the convention the Hon. William C. Preston. . . ."

The Macon Messenger gave the following brief account of Preston's effort:

Mr. Preston rose amid the acclamation of the Convention, and tendered his acknowledgement of the notice which had been taken of him, and made a review of the leading corrupt measures of the Administration.<sup>56</sup>

During the course of his address, one opposition paper wrote, "A Whig boy created an interruption by the explosion of a quantity of fire-crackers."<sup>57</sup>

Preston evidently did not speak to the convention formally on the second day of proceedings. Instead, he "addressed a large assemblage from the portico of the Central Hotel, for an hour and a half," before the convention reconvened.<sup>58</sup>

Following the Macon meeting Preston hastened back to Columbia for a period of rest. But his Whig friends allowed him little time for recuperation. On July 28, he and Thompson were back on the front lines, speaking at Danville, Virginia, at a dinner tendered to them by the Whig leaders of there.<sup>59</sup> On September 2, Preston, Legare, and Thompson were privileged to furnish the rhetorical cannonade at a meeting of the Whig State Rights party of Richland District. The first session of the meeting, held in Columbia's town

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Quoted, ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Niles' National Register, LVIII (August 1, 1840), 345.



hall, established the intensely partisan character of the proceedings, for the preamble of the resolutions submitted to the assemblage defined in caustic language the numerous objections to the election of Van Buren.

After the morning business had been accomplished, the "meeting then formed in procession . . . and marched to the barbecue ground, in a grove contiguous to the town." According to the account of the Chronicle, "Shortly after 12, the Hon. W. C. Preston, the Hon. Waddy Thompson, and Hugh S. Legare, Esq., arrived, each of whom was received by the assembled multitude with reiterated cheers." Preston was "first called for," but "gracefully declined the lead" to Thompson and Legare. Thompson spoke for "nearly two hours," and was followed by Legare. Of Preston's effort, the Chronicle remarked, "Mr. Preston next addressed the assembly, in a speech of about an hour and a half, which fully sustained his high reputation. His neighbors, whom he has so often delighted with his eloquence, regarded it as one of his happiest efforts."<sup>60</sup>

Although worn almost to exhaustion by mid-September, Preston accepted yet another call from Virginia, which gave him an opportunity to visit his mother near Abingdon, and to get some much-needed rest. On September 22, he "addressed the people of Smyth, Virginia." He may

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<sup>60</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, September 10, 1840. Interestingly, the regular toasts of the Richland meeting reflect the bitterness of the Preston-Calhoun war. One toast to Preston was: "Educated and brought up amongst us from his youth--confident in his principles, proud of his talents, and grateful for his eminent services in the darkest hour of the State, will we coolly stand by and see him sacrificed to the great political Juggernaut, who, though born in the State, preferred to be brought up and educated among strangers?"

also have spoken to other assemblages, for the Richmond Whig, in announcing his presence in Abingdon, stated, "He, found awaiting him, numerous invitations to address the people of the south-western counties."<sup>61</sup> Thus, Preston's Whig friends were little inclined to allow him to quit the battle line.

Preston's speaking itinerary evidently closed in Virginia, where he rested during the fading days of the campaign in full confidence that a Harrison victory was beyond doubt.<sup>62</sup> During August he had been able to witness the happy results of his own and others' exertions, as the state elections in Kentucky and North Carolina "piled up unprecedented Whig majorities." As he brought to a close his arduous rhetorical crusade in October, he had the satisfaction of seeing Delaware, Maryland, and Georgia "reverse their majorities" and become Whig. The election results in Virginia, however, were doubtless the most gratifying of all, for as Cole states, the Shenandoah valley and the western part of the state "overcame the Whig majority of the older section by but little over one thousand votes."<sup>63</sup>

Exultant at the Harrison victory, the Whigs hailed the triumph "as a rebuke of federalism, the restoration of democratic republicanism to its legitimate ascendancy." Not the least jubilant was the handful of South Carolina Whigs, whose leaders in Charleston tendered

<sup>61</sup>Richmond Whig, September 29, 1840.

<sup>62</sup>One student of the 1840 Campaign mistakenly indicates that Preston addressed a Whig convention at Lynchburg on October 22. Preston did not speak on this occasion, but his cousin, William Ballard Preston of Virginia, evidently did. Gunderson, "A Political and Rhetorical Study of the 1840 Presidential Campaign," loc. cit., 492; Washington National Intelligencer, October 30, 1840.

<sup>63</sup>Cole, Whig Party in the South, 62.

a dinner to Preston "in testimony of their profound regard, and their gratitude" for his public services.<sup>64</sup> Although the dinner was given "as a mark of decided approbation" of Preston's services and "consistent career," the Charleston Whigs did not fail to recognize the untiring campaign efforts of Thompson and Legare. At a meeting at Rame's restaurant in Charleston, called to plan the Preston dinner, one of the resolutions submitted was:

We contemplate with great gratification the able and meritorious exertions of our Senator, the Hon. Wm. C. Preston; our late Representative, Hon. Waddy Thompson, and our distinguished fellow citizen, Hugh S. Legare throughout the struggle now so happily terminated. These gentlemen have added greatly to their previous well earned reputation, by their eloquent orations in defence of liberty, and by their gallant resistance to a bitter and intolerant majority at home, have deserved well of the country at large.<sup>65</sup>

The affair was a fitting climax to Preston's exertions in Harrison's behalf and his determined resistance to the administration of the "spoilers." The Whigs feted Preston in "the old theatre on Broad street." Reporting the occasion, the Charleston Courier declared that "A more numerous, respectable and influential assemblage of the citizens of Charleston, never convened together on a similar occasion, to do honor to any public representative."<sup>66</sup> The occasion was a heart-warming one for Preston, whose campaign exertions had undermined his health.<sup>67</sup> The third "regular toast," which

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<sup>64</sup>Charleston Courier, quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, December 3, 1840.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Charleston Courier, December 12, 1840.

<sup>67</sup>Preston to James L. Petigru, Columbia, n.d., quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, December 10, 1840.

lauded his "fearless and independent course," was received, according to the Courier, "with the most heart-felt and enthusiastic demonstration of approbation."

The eloquent Preston rose, "apparently deeply affected," to respond to the "kind and marked distinction." What followed was Preston's paen of triumph. To an audience that included Legare, Thompson, and Petigru, he spoke for "an hour and three quarters." Although his speech was not fully reported, some notion of its contents may be gained from a brief sketch presented by the Courier. According to the account, Preston discussed "the unhappy influence of the present administration, and the beneficial results that must naturally ensue from that of Gen. Harrison." The election had demonstrated, he declared, that the people had at last been "awakened to a sense of justice and their 'inalienable rights,'" and that "those rights, in a voice of thunder had been proclaimed upon the banks of the St. Lawrence and re-echoed from the valley of the Mississippi." The "flood gates" of public opinion had at length been opened, and the waters let loose to carry destruction upon the "spoilers." For his part, Preston believed that the administration were now left "without an Ararat to stand upon"--a consummation he had devoutly wished.<sup>68</sup>

The Courier, flushed with victory, heaped praise upon Preston's effort.

It is admitted by all, that Col. Preston seldom, if ever, delivered a more powerful appeal. . . . He enchained his audience with the most impassioned bursts of eloquence

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<sup>68</sup> Charleston Courier, quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, December 17, 1840.

and pathos we have ever listened to; and so completely were they taken by storm, that frequently the whole assemblage rose, as if with one voice, to urge on the inspired speaker.<sup>69</sup>

A number of years following this jubilant occasion in Charleston, one contemporary recalled that "The speakers on the occasion were Mr. Preston, Mr. Legare, and Mr. Petigru. It was equivalent to a liberal education and an event in one's life. Mr. Preston spoke first and his speech was an elegant indication of his political course."<sup>70</sup>

The "power and patronage party" had been put to rout, and Preston believed the new administration opened "with all happy auspices in its favor." He also thought the Harrison administration entitled to "a fair and candid trial." But he spoke of its future with reserve. Experience had taught, he wrote, that any administration must be "attended with that vigilance with which the trustees of power should always be watched."<sup>71</sup> There is not a scintilla of evidence, however, that Preston anticipated the post-election disunity which might properly have been expected to harass the Whigs. As earlier shown, the victorious party was vexed by extreme differences of opinion, and Preston found himself "crushed between Clayism and Tylerism."

The Whig victory was scarcely a guarantee of "stability and future harmony for the party." As one writer observes, "In reality, it but imposed upon the Whigs the necessity of marshalling and

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>James Petigru Carson (ed.), Life, Letters and Speeches of James Louis Petigru (Washington, 1920), 236-237.

<sup>71</sup>Preston to James L. Petigru, Columbia, n.d., quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, December 10, 1840.



organizing their forces for united and harmonious action."<sup>72</sup>

As events transpired, Preston was one of the Whig leaders who assumed a share of the burden of this important task. He had already contributed to the development of the new party between the years 1837-1841 by refusing to join Calhoun in committing the planting interests of South Carolina to the administration party. Essentially conservative, he preferred to exert his influence in behalf of a party that feared the disorganizing and "levelling tendencies" of the opposition and sought to safeguard the existing order. Eventually, Preston, along with Thompson, came to be a leader of the state rights wing of the Whig minority in South Carolina. Petigru added his weight to the Whig party in the state, and it was not long until Legare defected from the Democratic ranks to join the Whig minority. Although this small force was finally destroyed by Calhoun, Preston championed the Whig cause in the state, in an effort to add unity and strength to the Southern wing of the young party.<sup>73</sup> In his last session in the Senate, as stated earlier, he declined to consider a cabinet post under Harrison, because he feared that if he resigned his Senate seat Clay's bill for the re-establishment of a national bank might be defeated. Besides, in the 1840 campaign, Preston had assisted the Whig party to achieve its first presidential victory.

Although Preston had contributed in some measure to the development of the Whig party, between the years 1842 and 1844 he was

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<sup>72</sup>Cole, Whig Party in the South, 63.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 68, 81.



able to contribute little to the party's growth of unity. Yet in 1844 despite his feeble health, he again gave his assistance to the Whigs, delivering at least two major campaign speeches in behalf of their presidential candidate.

Clay was again the logical choice of the Whig party, and on May 1, when the National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Clay was chosen to head the ticket "without a dissenting voice" and Frelinghuysen of New Jersey was selected as his running mate. The platform was constructed to suit Clay in that "It avoided the Texas and bank questions and emphasized tariff, distribution, and usurpation by Executive."<sup>74</sup>

Less than a month later, when the Democrats assembled in Baltimore to choose their candidate, they found themselves almost hopelessly divided. Calhoun's backers were too few to nominate him, yet were strong enough to prevent Van Buren's selection "by carrying through the convention the rule that required a two-thirds vote for nomination." The tired delegates finally approved a suggestion of George Bancroft and voted unanimously for James K. Polk of Tennessee, "who thus became the first 'dark horse' in the history of the presidency."<sup>75</sup> As his running mate they selected George M. Dallas of Pennsylvania.

Polk, while a relatively unknown figure, was described by a deep-dyed Jacksonian as "a whole-hogged Democrat, the bosom friend of

<sup>74</sup>Eugene McCormac, James K. Polk (Berkeley, 1922), 229.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 236-239; Edward Channing, A History of the United States, 6 vols. (New York, 1926), V, 543-544.

General Jackson, and the known enemy of banks and distribution."<sup>76</sup> The Democrats pitted their candidate against one of the nation's ablest politicians in Henry Clay, characterized by Parrington as "A man of great personal charm, engaging manners, buoyant temperament, exuberant patriotism, and persuasive tongue."<sup>77</sup> But above all, Clay was a well-informed, practical statesman. The Whigs were thus blessed with a superior candidate in 1844.

Yet it was their misfortune that the Texas question became the dominant issue of the campaign. At Baltimore the Democrats, in response to the pressures of Manifest Destiny, wisely declared in favor of the "re-annexation of Texas at the earliest practicable period."<sup>78</sup> Clay, compromiser that he was, vacillated on the Texas issue. At the outset of the campaign, he took a bold stand against the annexation of Texas, believing that there was less pro-annexation sentiment in the South than commonly thought.<sup>79</sup> Clay summarized his views in his famous Raleigh letter, published by the Washington National Intelligencer on April 27. His confidence in his position was evidently shared by Preston, who wrote of Clay's letter, "That is a wonderfully clever letter of Mr. Clay's. The arguments strong, well put and delivered with noble gravity. Certainly the question is shall we go to war for Texas. The public mind is not heated on the subject in this State nor can the newspapers inflame

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<sup>76</sup>Quoted in McCormac, James K. Folk, 239.

<sup>77</sup>Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, II, 142.

<sup>78</sup>Niles' National Register, LXVI (June 1, 1844), 220.

<sup>79</sup>Cole, Whig Party in the South, 110.

it."<sup>80</sup> In another letter on the subject of annexation, Preston declared that the treaty with Texas should be rejected, "and when Clay is in and Mexico consents, the matter can be reviewed."<sup>81</sup> While Preston thus endorsed Clay's stand, many other earnest annexationists were hardly satisfied. As it became evident that Clay had taken the wrong position, he wrote other letters, shifting his ground. In doing so, he incurred the wrath of the root-and-branch abolitionists, without at the same time making any significant gains in the South.<sup>82</sup>

During the early months of 1844 Preston took no active part, remaining in Columbia, where he practiced law, sauntered through favorite works in his three-thousand volume personal library, and assisted Penelope with the entertainment of various itinerant guests. In May Preston was host to Fred Von Raumer, a professor of the University of Berlin, who reported his delightful experience. "Dined with an agreeable party at the house of Col. Preston. After dinner we had a very interesting conversation on Shakespeare and the Greek tragedians."<sup>83</sup> Clay also visited Columbia during the early summer as a guest of the Prestons "one square north of the college." A student of South Carolina College recalled seeing Preston and Clay "riding in Mr.

<sup>80</sup>Preston to Crittenden, Columbia, May 4, 1844, Papers of John J. Crittenden, Library of Congress.

<sup>81</sup>Id. to id., Columbia, June 5, ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Dickey, Seargent S. Prentiss, 240 ff, and Cole, Whig Party in the South, 111-113.

<sup>83</sup>Quoted in Margaret B. Meriwether, "Literature and the Theatre," Helen Kohn Henning (ed.), Columbia: Capital City of South Carolina (Columbia, 1936), 244-245.

Preston's open carriage around the campus grove."<sup>84</sup>

Finding the cause of Clay much too compelling to pursue the life of cultivated ease, Preston, within weeks after Clay's Columbia visit, was again heard on the hustings. Accompanied by Thompson and Yeadon, Preston journeyed to Greensboro, Georgia, in early August to assist the Clay cause at a mass Whig convention. The Whig orators were accompanied to Greensboro by a small South Carolina delegation, whose banner bore the motto, "The Whigs of South Carolina, as in 1776 so in 1844: few but firm and faithful." The meeting was held on a sprawling "camp ground on the slope of a hill." Berrien, president of the day, spoke first, and was followed by Preston. The Columbia Southern Chronicle reported:

Col. Preston . . . did full and ample justice to his own reputation; . . . his voice, weak at first, gradually became stronger as he proceeded, and rising with his subject, from one burst of eloquence to another still higher, he enchained and fascinated his vast audience by his glowing and fervid eloquence. Often as I have heard him I have never seen him approach nearer to my ideal of a perfect orator. He closed amid thunders of applause and has left an impression on the minds of the people of Georgia, as gratifying to himself, as it is honorable to the State which should be proud to call him her citizen. . . .<sup>85</sup>

From Georgia Preston may have proceeded to Tennessee to participate in a giant Whig festival held at Nashville on August 21 and 22, for according to one account his name appeared on the list of out-of-

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<sup>84</sup>Carlisle, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., 186. Clay wished no "public reception" while in Columbia, and the Prestons held only a "little reception" for him in their home.

<sup>85</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, August 7, 1844.

state dignitaries expected to attend.<sup>86</sup> Available newspaper accounts do not indicate, however, that he was present when "the speech of the occasion" was delivered by Seargent S. Prentiss.<sup>87</sup>

As September approached, Preston was forced out of the Whig front lines by the sudden illness of his adolescent daughter, Sally. Preston abandoned all political plans he may have had and hurried to New York where he placed Sally under the care of a noted physician.<sup>88</sup> To a Virginia correspondent he wrote that Sally's sudden illness had "arranged" all of his "purposes for the summer and autumn."

My poor child's condition is so low as to absorb all duties in the single one of attending to her. The judgement of the physicians on her case leave me little hope but from accident or a beneficent interposition of providence, and thus my whole time and all my care are devoted to her. What little political exertion I may be able to make can be only by the wayside--in compliance [sic] with pressing urgency on the spot--for my heart is otherwise occupied.<sup>89</sup>

On his return from New York to Charleston, Preston was prevailed upon by friends in Baltimore to address "an auditory of Whigs" on September 3. Careworn and suffering from a throat disorder, he nevertheless complied with the request and delivered his last major address of the campaign. Of his effort, one Baltimore paper wrote:

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<sup>86</sup>Vicksburg Tri-Weekly Whig, August 8, 1844, quoted in Dickey, Seargent S. Prentiss, 244.

<sup>87</sup>In the accounts published by Niles, and Gales and Seaton, which were drawn from the Daily Gazette and the Nashville Whig, Preston's name does not appear. Washington National Intelligencer, August 30, 1844; Niles' National Register, LXVII (September 14, 1844), 26.

<sup>88</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, September 4, 1844.

<sup>89</sup>Preston to General Campbell, Baltimore, September 3, 1844, David Campbell MSS, Duke University Library.

So vast was the crowd which assembled . . . to hear the Hon. Wm. C. Preston . . . , that the voice of the orator, though clear and distinct, was incapable of extending over the wide surface of the multitude. Those who were fortunate enough to be within hearing distance listened to one of the most eloquent of popular speeches. The audience . . . will long remember the impressive and captivating eloquence of this gifted orator. Whenever he is heard the cause of the Whigs and of the country cannot but be benefited.<sup>90</sup>

The Columbia Southern Chronicle presented to its readers a severely abridged report of Preston's one-hour speech at Baltimore. According to this report, Preston concerned himself chiefly with the personal qualifications of the two candidates. His hopes for a Whig victory in 1844 rested chiefly on Clay's superior qualifications. Soon after the Democrats had selected Polk as their standard bearer, Preston wrote that the "opposing party" had "taken the breeches of their Mahomet [Jackson] for a standard." A Polk victory would be a political "phenomenon," he asserted, since the hopes of the Democrats "must rest upon a recurrence of the unnatural prodigy of "A falcon, hovering in his pride of place / Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed."<sup>91</sup>

Such a view of the candidates was presented in Preston's

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<sup>90</sup>Baltimore American, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, September 6, 1844.

<sup>91</sup>Preston to the Buncombe County, North Carolina Whigs, June 30, 1844, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, August 30, 1844. Preston did not quote correctly from the dialogue between Ross and an Old Man outside Macbeth's castle after the murder of King Duncan. The speech of the Old Man runs: "A falcon, towering in her pride of place / Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd."



Baltimore address, in which he contrasted Polk and Clay, urging that Polk's election would endanger the integrity of the republic.<sup>92</sup>

Although in "a weak state of health," Preston told his audience, he wished to "indulge in a word or two of argument." Establishing the tenor of his line of argument, he asked first, "Why the agitation which pervades the public mind? . . . Is it to 'waft a feather or to drown a fly? Is it to elevate to office James K. Polk?' (Cries of no! no!)," Preston then proceeded to develop his objections to Polk. First, the office of president of this "glorious republic" was not to be filled by chance. "We have not only to elect a president, but to select one." The Democrats had not selected Polk; they had taken him "when all other resources had failed those who held the choice in their hands." A presidential nominee, he went on, must be selected for his "talents, experience, judgment, sound principles." Yet, "we are called upon," declared Preston, "to elevate to the highest office of the land, a man who was chosen by chance, and whose only recommendation is that he was called Young Hickory!"

Preston turned next to a depreciation of Polk's ability to fill the office of president. To accomplish this he presented a series of hypothetical problems Polk might be called upon to grapple with, pressing his conclusions with rhetorical questions. "Suppose," he began, "that the Abolition question should be so violently agitated as to threaten the kindling of the flames of civil war, what sort of man would then be required at the head of the government? A weak man?

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<sup>92</sup>Report of Preston's address taken from Columbia Southern Chronicle, September 20, 1844.

Would you place a weak, vacillating man at the head of affairs to suppress the evil?" If such a war should arise, would the "country do with James K. Polk?"

There were yet other objections to Polk. A weak and inexperienced man, he would be dominated by the "Public Cabinet, the Private Cabinet, the Back Parlour Cabinet, and the Kitchen Cabinet." Preston argued from the premise that a strong cabinet will not compensate for a weak government head. "If the head is weak, the Cabinet will be weak." He appealed to ancient and modern history "to prove that weak men can never be governed by strong ministers." Concluding his depreciatory discussion of Polk's qualifications, Preston averred, "These, my fellow citizens, are matters for calm, grave consideration. They are not mere tonics of declamation."

Preston grew tired, having spoken for nearly an hour, but his audience coaxed him along with "cries of 'go on! go on!'" He continued, taking up next the "financial question." "What has Polk to offer you?" he cried. "The Sub-Treasury. Are you prepared to receive it? (Cries of 'no, no.'). No you are not. It has turned the stomachs of even the Democratic party." Preston next contrasted the positions of the two parties on the tariff question. The Democrats, he claimed, were glaringly inconsistent on this issue. Polk's "barque shows itself in Charleston harbour, inscribed with the motto 'Free Trade,' and appears in Chestnut street dock with the words 'The Tariff' in its stead." But one could not "speak this way of Clay," whose course on the tariff question had been consistent. Besides, "Whatever may be the defects of the Tariff, Henry Clay has strength of mind and ability enough to

regulate it."

Preston went on to say that Clay was to be commended on yet other grounds. Clay would ask nothing "but the glory of his country." But, above all, he would protect the Union, for when the Union was once threatened, Clay had "stepped forward and averted the impending ruin."

After thus eulogizing Clay, Preston concluded by saying:

for all the gold of Ophir I would not forfeit the right of saying that I am a brother of the Whigs and never shall that consolation be torn from by bosom by any traitor until he tears the last palpitation from this heart.

With this statement Preston made his exit from the great struggles of party which had engaged his rhetorical powers since the days of South Carolina's nullification struggle. Consonant indeed was the closing utterance of this last partisan effort with his own character and his political course. Proud and doughty, he refused absolutely to cower before the onslaught of the Calhoun faction. "The Prestons," Van Buren once observed, "are a peculiar race." In "their composition" was "a large share of the bulldog spirit," but they were not less endowed "with the generous impulses of that noble mastiff, which seldom fail to show themselves when their passions are at rest."<sup>93</sup> It was also most fitting that Preston's final appearance in the political arena should be devoted to the cause of Clay, whose political thinking had exerted so profound an influence upon his own. The

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<sup>93</sup>John C. Fitzpatrick (ed.), "The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren," Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1918, 2 vols. (Washington, 1920), II, 769.

Columbia Southern Chronicle, in its final explanation of Preston's political views, declared that "the gradual revolution of the wheel of politics had brought Clay and Preston "together upon the firm middle ground of policy." "We believe that our violent Nullifiers were as ultra on the one side in 1830, as the Tariffites were on the other. The true compromise ground was midway between them. There it is that Mr. Preston has taken his stand. . . ."94

The November election was close, but Polk triumphed--chiefly because of Clay's uncertain position on the Texas question. It was clearly evident that the power of the Whig party lay in the Northern states. No states of the lower South supported Clay. Only Kentucky and North Carolina were "the safe Whig states whose interests were fully identified with those of the South."<sup>95</sup> Of the election results, Preston wrote, "For the present the Whig party of the South is dispersed; and we cannot know our position until the heat & the smoke of conflict have passed away."<sup>96</sup>

It was a matter of much regret to Preston that he had been unable to render greater service to Clay in the Kentuckian's try for the presidency. He was handicapped by his daughter's illness, but his own throat condition, which finally necessitated an operation, also hampered his campaign activities.<sup>97</sup> He was genuinely heartsick at Clay's

<sup>94</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, August 21, 1844.

<sup>95</sup>Cole, Whig Party in the South, 115.

<sup>96</sup>Preston to Clay, Columbia, November 23, 1844, The Papers of Henry Clay, Library of Congress.

<sup>97</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, October 2, 1844.

defeat. After the election he addressed to Clay a long, compassionate letter, seeking to help the Great Compromiser rationalize the November loss. "You have long since passed that point," wrote Preston, "when office could confer additional celebrity, or add an inch to the noble pre-eminence which history will assign to you." Preston's final words of comfort were: "I content myself with the thought that I have (in however subordinate a station) fought the battle of the country under your standard."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Preston to Clay, Columbia, November 23, 1844, Henry Clay Papers.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE EULOGIST

Preston wrote in 1841 to W. P. Mangum, in reference to a eulogy the latter had been asked to pronounce on William Henry Harrison:

Your letter . . . removes a world of uneasiness concerning your health . . . but as you had undertaken to deliver an oration, I can't think much is the matter with you. For my own part, I have never in my whole life had health or spirits to deliver an oration--and regard it as so great a bore that I congratulate you on having just enough ill health to excuse you from it.<sup>1</sup>

By the term "oration" Preston obviously meant the elaborately prepared, dignified, ceremonial address, a form of public speech in which, as he implied, he was neither experienced nor interested. True, Preston, now in his forty-second year, had little experience in ceremonial speaking, and had evidently never prepared and presented the long, formal oration, so common to his times. His evident lack of interest in demonstrative speaking appears somewhat paradoxical in the light of his abiding interest in matters esthetic. Still, a practical cast of mind and a combative temper fitted him admirably for the utilitarian character of motivative speaking.

Circumstances caused Preston to give increasing attention to the ceremonial address after his exit from the political arena. As

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<sup>1</sup>Preston to Mangum, Columbia, May 3, 1841, Willie Person Mangum Papers.



a private citizen he had more leisure time. Also, his numerous friends in the state seized upon the speech of special occasion as a means of tendering their respect to him. As it transpired, Preston delivered on November 7, 1843, a eulogy on Hugh S. Legare which proved one of the most significant addresses of his oratorical career. Hence, the irony of his attitude of indifference toward the "oration," as expressed in the letter to Mangum.

Preston brought to the task of preparing and delivering the formal eulogy on Legare scant experience in this form of address. While a member of the Senate, he had presented only two brief eulogies. The first was pronounced in the United States House of Representatives, on April 2, 1834, the date set apart for eulogistic commemoration of James Blair,<sup>2</sup> a South Carolina Unionist who served from the Twenty-first to the Twenty-third Congresses.<sup>3</sup> Preston also delivered in the Senate on May 3, 1836, a eulogy on Richard I. Manning,<sup>4</sup> governor of South Carolina from 1824 to 1826, and representative elected to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Blair.<sup>5</sup>

On both occasions, Preston fulfilled the customary practice of paying tribute to a deceased colleague. As might be expected, each of these brief addresses followed the stereotyped pattern for a "minor"

<sup>2</sup>Text of the "Eulogy on James Blair" given in Niles' Weekly Register, XLVI (April 5, 1834), 89.

<sup>3</sup>Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927, 708.

<sup>4</sup>Text of the "Eulogy on Richard I. Manning" printed in Cong. Globe, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., 415, and Washington National Intelligencer, May 3, 1836.

<sup>5</sup>Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927, 1286.

eulogy on a government official. Both speeches were formal--almost perfunctory--statements of tribute, beginning with references to the speaker's feelings of sorrow, and discussing in general terms the subject's leading virtues. Neither effort sheds light on Preston's methods in eulogistic speaking. Rather, they reveal much about Preston as a person. Each pays tribute to the character and service of men whom he had warmly opposed during the bitter nullification struggle. But Preston was by nature compassionate, and quick to forgive either the personal or political affront. Thus, he could say of Manning, "Although I have had much occasion to feel the adverse influence of his high character, there is no man who loved him living, or mourned him dead, more than I,"<sup>6</sup> and of Blair, "God forbid that any such [political] differences should impede for a moment the sad current of feeling which now passes through my heart."<sup>7</sup>

Soon after Legare's death on June 20, 1843, the city of Charleston began preparations for an elaborate ceremonial to its honored son. At a public meeting in early July, a committee of twenty-one, composed of all shades of political opinion, was appointed to select an orator to pronounce the eulogy. Preston was the committee's unanimous choice, and the Columbia orator readily assented. Shortly following Preston's selection, the mayor of Charleston, John Schnierle, issued a proclamation declaring November 7 "a day dedicated to the ceremonies to be

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<sup>6</sup>"Eulogy on Richard I. Manning," Washington National Intelligencer, May 3, 1836.

<sup>7</sup>"Eulogy on James Blair," Niles' Weekly Register, XLVI (April 5, 1834), 89.

performed in honor of the memory of our late distinguished and lamented fellow-citizen, Hugh S. Legare." Schnierle's proclamation also recommended that "on that day all places of amusement and business should be closed during the hours of the procession and delivery of the Eulogium, that all classes may have an opportunity of participating." During the week preceding the ceremonial, both the Mercury and the Courier carried the mayor's proclamation as well as the committee's plan for the "order of the procession" and "regulations to be observed" both in the procession and at the Circular Church on Meeting Street, where the ceremonial was to be held.

Preston was an ideal choice to give utterance to the general sorrow which followed Legare's death, and to pay tribute to Legare's many high claims to distinction as a man and a public servant. Perhaps no other living man had been more intimately associated with the "Charleston Intellectual." Preston and Legare began their long friendship at South Carolina College when Legare was a sophomore. Their association was renewed during their European travels in 1818 and 1819. They had roomed together at Edinburgh, and both Preston's Reminiscences and Legare's correspondence glow with their mutual feelings of cordiality and admiration. In addition, both men had participated in the struggles of the same political forums--in the South Carolina legislature, in Congress, and, finally, in the Campaign of 1840. While they had frequently differed on points of public policy, their friendship had not suffered the slightest diminution.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>This was true despite the fact that Preston, in a moment of pique, had given vent to his irritation at Legare's support of Van

For yet other reasons, Preston was ideally suited to pronounce the eulogy on Legare. He, like Legare, was a lawyer, a politician, and an able speaker. Learned, imaginative, and "eminently esthetic in his tastes," he was qualified to do just honor to learning, eloquence, and public worth. Finally, he was an orator of high reputation whose known rhetorical abilities were calculated to inspire confidence in those who coveted the finest tribute for the distinguished Carolinian.

At 9:30 a. m. on the morning of November 7, the solemn proceedings began as the procession formed "on the South Bay Battery, on the North pavement, between King and Meeting Streets." An august procession it was, led by a city marshal and "music." Behind the "music" were "the citizens," clothed in black, followed by foreign consuls, survivors of the Revolution, officers of the revenue service, Army and Navy officers, members of the bar, "Judges of U. S.--State and City Courts," the clergy "of all denominations," members of the state legislature, the governor and his staff, relatives of the deceased, the city council, and last, Preston and Mayor Schnierle.<sup>10</sup>

The weather in Charleston bespoke the funeral rhythm of the proceedings and the melancholy mood of those who paid tribute to Legare's majestic life. The morning was "wintry cold" and dreary. A fine mist fell from lowering clouds, and a chill wind blew in from

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Buren and Calhoun in a characteristically abrasive phrase, declaring Legare a "base pimp." Hotspur that he was, Preston typically disburdened his bosom so; then as quickly repented the acid outburst. Preston to Thompson, Columbia, July 10, 1842, Waddy Thompson Papers.

<sup>10</sup>Charleston Courier, November 8, 1843.

the bay. The Courier reported that "Notwithstanding the very inclement weather, the procession was formed, near the appointed hour, and moved up Meeting Street to the Circular Church."<sup>11</sup>

By 10:00 a. m. "the spacious interior" of the elegant old Church was packed "with a throng of both sexes, anxious at once to hear the eloquent eulogist, and to pay tribute of respect and affection to departed genius, learning and worth." The exercises were opened with a prayer by "the Rev. Dr. Post, Pastor of the Church, followed by an anthem from the choir."<sup>12</sup>

Preston rose and "with Roman ease" took his place behind the ornate pulpit, fully conscious of his heavy responsibility. Seated before him in the sanctuary were the grave countenances of the Charleston rustic and the man of gentle blood, of the untutored and the cultivated. The church galleries, "reserved exclusively for ladies" were crowded to capacity with both calico and crinoline. To satisfy the esthetic hunger of all was Preston's assignment, and upon his ten-thousand word eulogy, regarded commonly by nineteenth-century orators as "a most difficult species of composition," he had lavished care befitting the circumstances.

Many who had heard the "Inspired Declaimer" at the peak of his career, in the Senate and on the hustings, as he "poured forth his cataracts of eloquence," probably noticed a sharp contrast between his physical appearance now and that of former days. His tall person was

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.; Charleston Mercury, November 8, 1843.

still commanding, but illness had taken elasticity from his carriage and color from his face. The black suit and dark wig that he wore for the occasion accented the sallowness of his once ruddy face and the prominence of his "expressive blue eyes."<sup>13</sup>

Characteristically, Preston's opening words were uttered deliberately, distinctly, and "in a subdued tone."<sup>14</sup> For "an hour and twenty minutes" Preston spoke, reported the Mercury; according to the Courier, he "enchained the attention of a deeply interested audience, with one of the richest feasts of both mind and heart, it has ever been our privilege to enjoy."<sup>15</sup>

Preston's conception of the nature and function of the eulogy, as illustrated by the one on Lagare, was sound. He presented Lagare as a symbol of an ideal, which, impliedly at least, was of far greater significance than the man himself.<sup>16</sup> In so doing, he concerned himself with: (1) the end goal of Lagare's life; (2) the major attainments of his life; (3) the well-springs of his strength; (4) the qualities of mind and heart which marked him as a great person; (5) the values which others might draw from contemplation of his life; and (6) a final

<sup>13</sup>Harriet Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel, 2 vols. (London, 1838), I, 179; William J. Rivers, Anecdotes About Our Literary Men, MS, in possession of Mr. Thomas Moore Craig, Moore, South Carolina; Charleston Courier, November 8, 1843.

<sup>14</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 5; United States Gazette, August 5, 1841, quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, September 1, 1841; Charleston Mercury, November 8, 1843.

<sup>15</sup>Charleston Mercury, November 8, 1843; Charleston Courier, November 8, 1843.

<sup>16</sup>For this concept of the function of the eulogy the writer is indebted to the late Professor Lew Sarett.



estimate of his probable position in history. Withal he gave significance to the matter of his address.

Equally skillful was his compositional technique. He employed the selective method in patterning his materials, as against the straight biographical method, but held his topics together by a thread of chronology. In his handling of biographical detail, he selected and suppressed artistically, reinforcing his significant ideas. He strove, through the use of concrete incidents to humanize Legare--to make him appear a human being instead of a bloodless, formidable figure--a requisite of the eulogy so frequently neglected by the speaker of Preston's as well as our own day. Preston also composed in a style suited to the dignity of the subject, the mood of his audience, and the character of the occasion. Stylistic splendor--required by the eulogy--he achieved by a stately rhythm of sentence and a nice blending of the sensory and the abstract word. Studiously avoiding the overly-dressed passage, he expressed his ideas in a dignified, sincere literary style, judiciously heightened by the allusion and the literary quotation.

With the following words Preston began his stately exordium.

As some months have passed since the death of Mr. Legare, we are in a better condition of mind to consider his character, than at the time it was the pleasure of the citizens of Charleston to honor me with the duty I am now here to perform. When such a calamity is recent, and especially when it is without those warnings which, in the ordinary course of things, enable us, in some sort, to prepare ourselves, a gush of sensibility sweeps away the faculty of sober judgment or just discrimination. We grieve, and love, and admire, and exalt, and exaggerate the virtues and merits of the dead, in language of unmeasured eulogy. All of us remember

how much this was the case, when the intelligence of Mr. Legare's death came suddenly upon us.<sup>17</sup>

Still by way of introduction, Preston referred briefly to Legare's highest distinctions. He had been Attorney General of the United States and at the time of his death, was Secretary of State. Yet, declared Preston, "We who knew him, believed he was yet in his orient; and that he was destined to an ascension independent of, and beyond, official station." This Preston could say because Legare had early in life proposed to himself "the noblest ends by the noblest means." Throughout his life he had kept before him "a beau ideal of intellectual excellence," which he had "fashioned and perfected as he advanced in knowledge, like the aggregated beauties in the statue of Prometheus." In this continual reaching for the noble ideal of intellectual excellence, Preston found the true significance of Legare's life. Such, moreover, was also the value and inspiration of Legare's life to the auditor. But the achievement of the noble ideal, Preston went on, was the joint product of two resources: genius and "steady diligence."

Leaving his exordium, Preston introduced his specific rhetorical objective, which he prefaced with two of his favorite premises:

Indeed, in labor itself there is an honor and a happiness, and a capacity for it is a talent and a blessing. Intellectual excellence is but little less the achievement of industry than of genius. How wide their joint conquests, is shown in the life of Hugh S. Legare, which I now propose to sketch.

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<sup>17</sup>Text of Preston's eulogy, as he prepared it for publication, taken from Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 3-31.

In developing Legare's life as a majestic illustration of what genius and industry compounded might achieve, Preston chose the selective-chronological mode of composition. He built his discussion around six topics, considering Legare as a scholar, a jurist, a statesman, an orator, a writer, and a human being. These six heads were bound together by a thread of chronology, which carried Legare from his ancestry to his death.

Speaking at a rate of about 125 words per minute--an unusually slow rate for him--Preston considered Legare first as a scholar. He outlined his ancestry and his early training, interspersing his discussion with poignant incidents to demonstrate Legare's early dedication to the ideal of intellectual excellence, and to show the obstacles against which Legare had been obliged to labor. Preston pointed out that Legare's "inclination for sedentary and studious pursuits" was doubtless strengthened, "as in the case of Byron or Scott," by a physical defect. Preston recalled his college days with Legare at Columbia, declaring:

There he was not only learning but feasting. He was not only making stages on a journey, but lured on from height to height, enraptured with the growing scene, until all the glorious creations of Greek and Roman genius, lay like a landscape, beneath him.

Humanizing Legare, Preston next recalled that the fourteen-year-old Hugh "was not indisposed to exhibit his [Intellectual] acquisitions, nor backward in permitting it to be understood that he intended to run for the honors of his class." An extensive quotation from Legare showed what a student should accomplish in college. Legare had declared, in part:

All that we ask is that a boy should be thoroughly taught the ancient languages from his eighth to his sixteenth year, or thereabouts, in which time he will have his taste formed, his love of letters completely, perhaps enthusiastically, awakened, his knowledge of the principles of universal grammar perfected, his memory stored with the history, the geography and the chronology of all antiquity, and with a vast fund of miscellaneous literature besides, his imagination kindled with the most beautiful and glowing passages of Greek and Roman poetry and eloquence; all the rules of criticism familiar to him--the sayings of sages, and the achievements of heroes, indelibly impressed upon his heart. He will have his curiosity fired for further acquisition, and find himself in possession of the golden keys which open all the recesses where the stores of knowledge have ever been laid up by civilized man. The consciousness of strength will give him confidence, and he will go to the rich treasures themselves and take what he wants, instead of picking up eleemosynary scraps from those whom, in spite of himself, he will regard as his betters in literature. He will be let into the great communion of scholars, throughout all ages and all nations. . . .

Continuing his discussion of Legare's scholarship, Preston claimed:

He did not fall into the fatal error of supposing that the college course completed his education. . . . He had learned enough--no inconsiderable knowledge--to know his ignorance, and did not believe that he had even laid a foundation, but had merely been collecting materials for an education.

Preston then sketched at some length Legare's "multifarious reading" as preparation for admission to the bar, and the cultural advantages of which Legare had availed himself during his travels in Europe. In Paris, Legare had feasted his mind in the galleries of fine arts and the theaters; he had studied the French and Italian languages with assiduity; and he had delved into Italian literature. Different from most other travelers, Legare was of such noble structure that he was "placed beyond the seductive allurements" of Paris, in which "young foreigners so often 'Their friends and native home forget / To roll

with pleasure in a sensual styel."

Keeping in the forefront of his discussion Legare's almost superhuman devotion to the austere existence of the ascetic, Preston turned next to Legare's studies at the University of Edinburgh, where he had shared a room with the Charlestonian. He recalled the "quiet diligence" with which Legare had addressed himself to a "mass of labor," and used an incident to illustrate. "On one occasion he found himself at breakfast Sunday morning, on the same seat where he had breakfasted the day before, having remained in it four and twenty hours." Preston recalled also Legare's "systematic study" of the civil law at Edinburgh, and his deep interest in the preaching of Dr. Chalmers, whom he regarded as "the first orator of Europe." After referring to Legare's subsequent travels in Scotland, Belgium, Holland, and France, Preston concluded, "Nothing now was wanting to his education. It was complete in all its parts. It rarely happens that such opportunities have been afforded, and still more rarely that they have been so well used."

Preston turned next to a consideration of Legare's career in the South Carolina legislature. The mainsprings of Legare's power as a legislator, Preston thought, were his "application to business," his "abundant knowledge," and his "shining qualities as a speaker." Keeping his language on a purely descriptive level, Preston sketched hurriedly Legare's political course. Legare had been a strict constructionist, although he had dissented from enforcement of the doctrine of state interposition on the grounds that such action was both unconstitutional and inexpedient. Understandably, Preston made no



mention of the rhetorical struggle between himself and Legare on this question, for most of his auditors would doubtless remember their conflicts. Closing his discussion of Legare the legislator, Preston gave free play to his generous impulses, declaring that the legislature's elevation of Legare to Attorney General of the state was

an act not less creditable to him than illustrative of the character of that people who can recognize and reward merit in an adversary, and who, when the cause of opposition is removed, rejoice that bitterness has passed away, and scorn the meanness of revenge.

Preston introduced his third topic as follows: "Mr. Legare's early success in obtaining business at the bar was not commensurate with his acknowledged talents and learning." Preston elaborated on this generalization with frankness and tact.

His secluded habits of study, which had increased a certain sensitiveness of temperament, made him shy of the rough contact . . . of a *nisi prius* [jury trial] court room. The . . . manipulation of forensic business in the preparation and trial of causes, seemed to require more alertness than was consistent with the heavy armour with which he had provided himself for the sterner conflicts of the profession. Hence it was that he did not rise by the ordinary progression of ascending efforts, but at length descended upon the very heights of the profession, from a more elevated region, in which his ability and learning had placed him.

His "organ-toned" voice filling the circular interior of the old church, Preston continued his discussion of Legare's juristic achievements, recalling that Legare's eminent success in arguing a case before the Supreme Court and the "political condition of the country" had served to elevate the law profession "in his mind from a secondary to a primary object." Encouraged by Edward Livingston, Secretary of the State, Legare had determined to "prosecute the study



of . . . [civil law] for great national purposes." Legare had concluded that "it was practicable and desirable to infuse a larger portion of the spirit and philosophy of the civil law . . . into our system of jurisprudence."

Doubtless in recognition of the presence of lawyers in his audience, Preston digressed at length to discuss in clear language the nature of the great task of juridical reform which Legare imposed upon himself. He pointed out that the character of American's political institutions, "republican habits," and physical environment had "forced upon us great changes in the system of common law." After contrasting and praising the English and the American judicial systems, Preston returned to his topic, defining Legare's self-appointed task of law reform.

Whatever advantages our system might be supposed to possess in the aggregate, Mr. Legare determined upon a diligent and extended prosecution of the study of civil law, that he might distinctly understand what, if any portion, could be advantageously adopted--and he came to the conclusion, after several years of severe application, that much might be effected.

Such then, was one of Legare's most notable contributions to society--a contribution built by the joint agents of genius and austere diligence.

Continuing his long analysis of Legare's judicial accomplishments, Preston next characterized the closing years of Legare's law practice which followed his short congressional career. He recalled of Legare:

Animated by a competition which tasked all his resources, he displayed so much learning, that the courts in which he appeared expanded into a forum, and became objects of

public attraction, to which multitudes flocked as to a theatre, and from which opinions, principles, and emotions were propagated through the community.

Preston now set the capstone on his tribute to Legare as a lawyer. In his opinion, "Mr. Legare shewed himself master of the entire scale of the profession, rising with grace and ease through all its gradations, from the keenest logic to the most magnificent and gorgeous displays of eloquence."

Preston felt impelled, before leaving his consideration of Legare's career at the bar, to enter his refutation of a popular indictment of the Charlestonian's judicial abilities. First, he stated the charge. "In the vulgar estimation, the brilliancy of Mr. Legare's oratory, and the extent of his literary attainments, were inconsistent with the qualities which make a successful lawyer." What followed was a trenchant statement of Preston's own philosophy of what constituted a sound legal training.

In offering his refutation, Preston surged to a minor climax in composition. He shortened his sentences and quickened his speaking rate. With incisive maxims he began:

Envy is unwilling to acknowledge excellence in many departments at once. Mediocrity is incredulous of the power of genius. The dull and mechanical, who drive the trade of law for a livelihood, find consolation in believing that eloquence and literature are incapable of their dry routine, "And shook their heads at Murray for a wit."

Preston noted that "The prejudice has existed from the time of Cicero to the present, and will shew itself whenever a Mansfield or an Erskine, a Pinckney or a Legare, is present to provoke it."

Preston slowed his speaking rate and lengthened his sentences,

expounding his views with clarity and incisiveness. His statement bore the impress of mature reflection. The prejudice, he said, was an "unworthy" one,

for as law is man's rule of conduct in all his relations, from dust to deity, whatever concerns the human heart or the human intellect, is not altogether foreign to it; and although the juridical application of law stops short and falls below some of its higher obligations, yet the most elevated of them press down upon and influence and control the adjudications of the court, which, on the minutest matter, have an upward reference, . . . even into the bosom of God. The wider the field of knowledge, the more extended the choice of analogies; the intensity of the focus is in proportion to the number of rays. Even that kind of learning which cultivates most the imagination, is always occupied with the business and bosoms of men. Pure Literature--distinguished not only from science, but from philosophy--as it deals with the sentiments and passions of the human heart, and is excellent in proportion as it deals most intimately and justly with them, is full of the daily business of man.

Thus, it was Preston's conclusion that "not only is all learning fit and proper for the lawyer, but also a vigorous and active imagination." Illustrating with a forceful figurative analogy, he continued, "The eagle's beak and talons may be keen and strong enough to tear its prey, but it is the plumage of his wing that bears him on high, to discover the quarry, and brings him upon it with irresistible force."

Preston was ready to admit that "there may be an injudicious application of extensive learning, or a meretricious display of fancy," but, in his opinion "a just judgment and ignorance are not necessarily conjoined, nor correct taste found only where there is a want of imagination." With these words he slit open one of the dearest notions of the legal profession of his times. And his knife had been forged not only in his own thinking, but also in that of Hugh Blair, Legare, and Chief Justice Story. Going further, he tied his line of

thought to Legare's career, saying, "Where there is a fixed purpose of life, as was the case with Mr. Legare, in regard to his profession, all studies and acquisitions become subsidiary to it. All sources of learning, however remote, pour their tributes into the main stream, though it may be through strange and devious channels." Legare himself had written an essay on Roman legislation, in which was shown "how all learning may be brought to bear upon legal discussions, and how the most brilliant fancy is consistent with dry detail and minute criticism."

Preston turned next to his fourth topic, an appraisal of Legare's writings. Since Legare's works were strongly influenced by his reading, Preston first commented on Legare's reading habits. Again, Preston saturated his discussion with his own philosophy, beginning, "It was a saying of Lord Bacon that 'reading maketh a full man, conference or speaking a ready man, and writing an exact man.' Their combination constitutes the highest degree of intellectual culture." Remembering perhaps Cicero's dictum that comparison of the subject with other great men "has a noble effect in panegyric," Preston placed Legare among the distinguished company of Cicero and Burke, "who most eminently fulfilled" the Baconian conditions. "In considering the character of Mr. Legare," he went on, "we cannot but recall these illustrious men, each of whom was conspicuous in the affairs of life, and distinguished for writing, for eloquence, for scholarship and love of philosophy." As for Legare's reading, it was "as extensive and as exact" as that of either Cicero or Burke.

Turning to an evaluation of Legare's works, Preston declared,

"His published writings are characterized by copiousness of learning, judiciously applied. . . . They are distinguished by a tone of philosophy and high sentiment, and indicate a mind habitually conversant with the grand and beautiful in morals and intellect." In Preston's judgment Legare's essay on Athenian Democracy, published in the Southern Review (1838), was his most distinguished work. He thought it "the ablest composition of the kind" that had "appeared on this side of the Atlantic," and placed it on a par with the writings of Cicero and Burke. "There is nowhere a more subtle analysis of Greek institutions, or a more statesman-like estimate of democracy."

Preston characterized Legare's style as "copious and elaborate; his sentences, in general, stately and measured, and constructed with a view to harmony." Preston also believed that a consideration of Legare's development as a writer would show "a gradual approximation to a simpler elegance, the result of a more perfect art."

Unifying his composition, Preston laced his next topic to the Bacon quotation, and proceeded to an appraisal of Legare's public address, declaring, "The glory of eloquence was, for many years of his life, the chief object of his ambition." Preston's audience doubtless expected that he would articulate his own views on the art of his special love. This he had never done, but now felt disposed to do it. His appraisal of Legare's oratory became the structural climax of his eulogy, and was characterized by incisiveness of thought, a rising tempo, and the simple elegance of style which he regarded as the sine qua non of all art. He infused his discussion with his own philosophy of rhetoric, and what he said in some fourteen minutes constituted the

most significant published creation of his mind. What he said, as well as the way he said it, compares favorably with many of the most distinguished speculations on rhetoric.<sup>18</sup>

Preston turned his attention first to Legare's oratorical training. The crippled Charlestonian had been "smitten" with the love of eloquence in early life, and had cultivated assiduously the art of speaking. "He was endowed with an active imagination, warm sensibilities, a vigorous mind, and an easy flow of speech." To these he added "all that labor could achieve," attending to the "minuter accomplishments of voice and gesture, which contribute in their degree to successful speaking. . . ." By perseverance, Legare had "overcome defects," achieving effectiveness in bodily communication. By severe practice he had also "brought his voice to great perfection, especially in its loftier tones. . . ."

Preston next focused his critical judgment upon Legare's oratory. He observed:

The effluence of his [Legare's] knowledge and the quickness of his sensibility, gave him a tendency to amplitude and vehemence, which exposed his oratory to the charge of declamation, as his literary accomplishments had created a suspicion of his law knowledge--the same error arising from the same sources.

Preston, whose own speaking had been similarly indicted, set up now his own critical standard for judging the merit of oratorical style. "In the art of speaking, as in all other arts, a just combination of those qualities necessary to the end proposed, is the true rule of taste. . . . Elegance is in a just medium." But, in Preston's

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<sup>18</sup>Since Preston's views on rhetoric are presented in a later chapter, they will only be touched briefly here.



judgment, "The safer side to err on, is that of abundance--as profusion is better than poverty; as it is better to be detained by the beauties of a landscape, than by the weariness of the desert." Thus, Legare had erred on the "safer side."

Vindicating Legare's style still further, Preston declared:

If Mr. Legare erred in his general manner of speaking, it was not accidental, but the result of a wrong judgment; for his opinion was, that the elegant and vehement style of oratory was the best.<sup>19</sup> He concurred with Mr. Hume, that "ancient eloquence--that is, the sublime and passionate--is of a much juster taste than the modern, or the argumentative and rational; and, if properly executed, will always have more command and authority over mankind."<sup>20</sup>

Preston completed his appraisal of Legare's oratorical practice with the observation that he was "habitually on his guard against" the faults of "heat and redundancy." But he had "sometimes restrained himself too much, and thus permitted the hearer to discover somewhat of his art, the perfection of art being to conceal itself." Preston's point was that "There were occasions on which . . . [Legare] exhibited obedience to rules, when, perhaps, he might have snatched a grace beyond the reach of art. . . ."

Preston closed his critical estimate with a statement of Legare's conception of the "office and mission of the orator." His

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<sup>19</sup>In a penetrating analysis of the basic differences in ancient and modern oratory, published in the Southern Review, Legare expressed the view Preston attributes to him. He says that the social and political "circumstances" of the modern era "are adverse to the real grandeur of eloquence, to its vehemence and energy--to its picturesque expression, as well as to its positive results." Legare, "Ancient and Modern Oratory," loc. cit., 324.

<sup>20</sup>See David Hume, Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1817), II, 99.

conception was an "exalted one," suggested Preston, for he concurred with the Archbishop of Cambray [Fenelon] that "eloquence . . . is a very serious art, designed to . . . make men good and happy."

The latter statement provided a transition to a brief analysis of the mainsprings of Legare's power, and a final judgment on his career. With "lofty sentiment" Legare had "approached all the offices of life": To all of his duties he had brought "a natural conscientiousness and earnestness." These two qualities had animated his "whole character and conduct." These were the character attributes, moreover, that stamped Legare as a great person.

Their influence may be perceived in all he accomplished. They purified and elevated his character in whatever point of view we may consider him--either as a scholar, as a writer, as a Statesman, as a lawyer, or as an orator; so that when our country proudly points to the catalogue of her sons in either of these departments, there will be conspicuous upon it the name of Hugh S. Legare.

Preston introduced now the final topic of his address, saying, "Let us turn for a moment, to contemplate his private and personal traits." The discussion which followed mars somewhat the total effect of the composition. It violates neither the unity nor the coherence of the address but, following as it did the major structural climax, it creates an anticlimax. By devoting less time to his final topic than to preceding ones, however, and by using a preponderance of short, declarative sentences to step up the tempo, he lost little compositional power.

Preston considered Legare's "domestic relations," which, he thought, "were of the tenderest and most enduring kind." Legare's friendships were "strong and enduring." His conversation, Preston

described as "elegant." It was the conversation of "a scholar and a man of the world. . . . He exhibited knowledge without ostentation, and learning without pedantry." Finally, Preston noted that Legare was sincerely patriotic, and that particularly dear to him had been "his own State," and "his native city of Charleston." Thus, declared Preston in conclusion: "Nothing could more have soothed his dying moments than to know that you would have honored his memory with this public mourning, while you proudly present it to the country as 'something it will not willingly let die.'"

Preston's eulogy was a just and noble tribute to Legare. Without the benefit of historical perspective, he captured the real meaning of Legare's life, which he depicted as a symbol of the ideal of intellectual excellence. He also isolated with mental acuity the main-springs of Legare's power, as well as the qualities which marked Legare as a great person. Finally, he suggested the inspiration of Legare's life to his listeners, and ventured an amazingly accurate assessment of Legare's likely place in history. That Preston met the esthetic requirements of his audience appears certain. The extent to which he succeeded is suggested in the comments of both the Mercury and the Courier. The Mercury, whose columns had once flamed with severe denunciations of Preston, declared of the effort, "It was indeed eminently worthy of the author and his subject--characterized by simplicity of language, warmth of feeling, a generous appreciation and luminous exhibition of the intellectual history and achievements of Mr. Legare."<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the Courier spoke of Preston's address.

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<sup>21</sup>Charleston Mercury, November 8, 1843.

It is but echoing the universal sentiment to pronounce Mr. Preston's performance a masterly effort; chaste and simple in style, yet glowing with fine imagery and pervaded by a touching pathos and winning tenderness; in its narrative full of the charm of biography, and in its more reflective portions replete with all the higher requisites of the funeral oration; at once just and generous in its estimate and delineation of the character of the deceased, and elegant and discriminating in its criticism of his productions and performances as a writer and a speaker.<sup>22</sup>

Preston's eulogy on Legare is also an emblem of his own rhetorical versatility. Though he professed to have had "neither health nor spirits" for the "oration," and though he had scant experience in ceremonial address, he met the challenge of the "oration" in an effort that fulfilled admirably the requirements of eulogistic address. In this connection, be it noted also that Preston fully sustained his reputation as an orator, as evidenced by the remarks of both the Courier and the Mercury. The former paper, for example, observed that "the eulogist was signally felicitous, coming up to the full measure of public expectation." Preston had indeed something worthwhile to say, and he said it well. The eulogy on Legare was one befitting an orator who fulfilled the aspirations of America's golden age of eloquence.

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<sup>22</sup>Charleston Courier, November 8, 1843.

## CHAPTER XII

### LETTERED PATRIARCH

Preston's final years carried him into new activities befitting his intellectual accomplishments and public service. He had grown to maturity in a period of American life which was heavily influenced by "a desire to profit from . . . analogies with classical experience."<sup>1</sup> During that period it was quite as natural for a public man to pattern his life after one of the worthies of the ancient republics as it was for a senator to model his public address upon the example of Demosthenes or Cicero. Preston, whose oratory as well as personal appearance had been frequently brought into comparison with Cicero's, greatly admired the eloquent Roman and recognized features of his life which he desired to emulate. Like Cicero, he wished to teach the art of his special love--to experience the satisfaction of seeing himself surrounded by a "circle of ingenuous youths" eager to learn the skills of rhetoric. Like Cicero, too, he wished to enjoy a "lettered repose" after the struggles of the bar and the forum were over.<sup>2</sup> These desires were only vague yearnings of his life, not goals he earnestly struggled to achieve. They were details of the picture of his ambition left to be sketched in by the circumstances of personal

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<sup>1</sup>Matthiessen, American Renaissance, 18.

<sup>2</sup>See Preston's Address to the Students of the South Carolina College, January 5, 1846 (Columbia, 1846), 5-6.

qualification, of time, and of place. Without solicitation on his part, he became the fifth president of his alma mater, South Carolina College, where he also filled the chair of belles lettres and elocution. During the final nine years of his life, moreover, he devoted his fading energies to certain cultural undertakings and to various reform measures.

When the twenty-five member board of trustees of South Carolina College met in the faculty room of the college library on November 28, 1845, for the third session of its annual fall meeting, it faced a sobering situation. The cherished college was in a declining state and needed the restoration of public confidence. With Robert Henry, the institution's fourth president, there was widespread dissatisfaction. The helpless Henry was plagued with charges of "negligence of duties," and one newspaper thought him afflicted with "that rare republican vice--unpopularity," as well as with "the rare virtue of thinking everyone else wrong."<sup>3</sup> Another cause for concern was the enrollment, which had sagged lower with each passing year of Henry's administration, dropping from a peak of 160 during the tenure of Robert Barnwell, the third president, to a low of 122 in the third year of Henry's administration.<sup>4</sup>

The major item on the board's agenda was the question of Henry's removal. A five-member investigating committee, formed to draw up a report on Henry's administration, was ready with its findings. The

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Hollis, South Carolina College, I, 145-146.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 145.



grave-faced members of the board listened to the reading of the unfavorable report which charged that "there is a general dissatisfaction among the people with the president," and recommended that Henry be removed from office. John B. O'Neill, one of the most courageous members of the board, got the floor immediately and moved that the report be adopted, and that the board proceed immediately to the election of a new president. O'Neill's motion carried by a vote of seventeen to eight.<sup>5</sup>

For the first time since its inception in 1805, the college had fallen upon evil days, and the solution now was obvious--the election of a president who "could at once inspire confidence and respect both at home and abroad." As always, scholarship was a prime requirement. But the worried trustees wanted now, above all else, a man with "a high national reputation," whose presence would attract larger numbers of students. Besides, they wished a congenial person with a sensitivity to public relations.<sup>6</sup>

Such a man was Preston. "A graduate of the College, and with brilliant reputation, nothing was more natural than that the Trustees should look to him to supply the vacancy."<sup>7</sup> Preston received twenty-one of the twenty-five votes,<sup>8</sup> becoming the first alumnus of the college to be elected to the presidency of the institution.

<sup>5</sup>Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, November 28, 1845.

<sup>6</sup>Columbia Daily Telegraph, May 15, 1850.

<sup>7</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 295.

<sup>8</sup>Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, November 28, 1845. Of the remaining four votes, James Thornwell received two; Judge D. L. Wardlaw, one; and Robert W. Barnwell, one.

At its fall meeting the board voted to allow Preston until January 1, 1846, "to enter on the duties of his office." It also appointed Dr. William Hooper, the professor of Roman literature, as acting president, and assigned Henry to the professorship of Greek literature. Finally, it resolved that

Belles Lettres be assigned to the President--Intellectual philosophy to the Professor of Rhetoric and Logic--moral philosophy to the Professor of Sacred Literature--& Political philosophy to the Professor of History & Economy.<sup>9</sup>

Preston could hardly decline the trustees' flattering offer. His election was a gratifying testimonial of their faith in his character and abilities, and he was not unaware that he had been chosen despite his differing with the state on certain political questions. The college presidency was also one of the most coveted positions in the state. "In prestige it ranked just behind the United States senatorships and the governorship, and was on a par with positions on the bench."<sup>10</sup> Besides, the position offered Preston an opportunity to relax; and the quiet walls of the college "promised to afford a respite, after years of intense excitement."<sup>11</sup>

There were serious objections to his accepting the college presidency. The position was certainly less lucrative than his law practice soon would have proven. A crucial consideration was his health, which was "now impaired." He feared that he possessed neither the physical stamina demanded by the position, nor the qualifications

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., November 29, December 2, 3, 1845.

<sup>10</sup>Hollis, South Carolina College, I, 142.

<sup>11</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 3.

necessary to discharge the duties of the office. Consequently, he accepted the trustees' offer "only after much solicitation" on the part of his friends.<sup>12</sup>

Preston's selection inspired renewed confidence in the future of the young college. The Columbia Southern Chronicle thought his election was "destined to infuse new life into the institution," and pointed to Preston's "reputation as a scholar, his gentlemanly ways, the suavity of his demeanor, and the amiability of his character."<sup>13</sup> The Charleston Courier predicted that his election would "give a standing and reputation to the college which it has not heretofore attained."<sup>14</sup>

Preston's administration became one of the most successful in the ante-bellum period of the institution's history. A contemporary styled it "the Periclean era" of the college, and predicted that his "regime will long remain without a parallel in the annals of the College." One historian has written, "If the twenty year period, 1835-1855, is considered the 'golden age' of the South Carolina College, then the Preston administration, lasting from 1846 to 1851, was the brightest era of all."<sup>15</sup>

Preston's administration was marked by an exceptionally strong faculty, a great increase in the size of the student body, an influx of out-of-state students, a notable increase in physical and in-

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.; Columbia Daily Telegraph, May 15, 1850.

<sup>13</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, December 3, 1845.

<sup>14</sup>Charleston Courier, December 1, 1845.

<sup>15</sup>Hollis, South Carolina College, I, 149.

instructional facilities, a renaissance of interest in rhetoric, and administrative reform.

Under the increasing strains of his many duties, Preston's health declined during his tenure as president and professor of belles lettres and elocution. But what he lacked in health, he compensated for in earnestness. La Borda believed that no one had "exhibited a more becoming zeal, or a livelier sense of his high responsibility."<sup>16</sup>

Though it was not customary to do so, Preston chose to begin his service to the college with an inaugural address to the students. One of the thorniest problems in the history of the college had been that of governing the hot-blooded Southern youth in the small student body. In Preston's undergraduate days this problem had taxed the ingenuity of Maxcy; Preston could not but remember this as he contemplated the occasion of his own inauguration as president. His determination was to give "a new tone" to faculty-student relations,<sup>17</sup> and the inaugural offered him the most effective and appropriate means of defining his policy.

Inauguration ceremonies were held at the college on the morning of January 6, 1846. Preston made no public announcement of his intention to deliver an address. But, according to the Southern Chronicle, "a rumor had got abroad that one was expected, and the Chapel was crowded with an auditory composed of the most respectable ladies and gentlemen of Columbia, who had embraced the opportunity of

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<sup>16</sup>La Borda, History of the South Carolina College, 295.

<sup>17</sup>Columbia Daily Telegraph, May 15, 1850.

hearing the distinguished orator."<sup>18</sup>

On this occasion Preston stood on the narrow stage of the little chapel, behind the same rostrum used by Maxcy. Doubtless he recalled the eloquent sermons of his former rhetoric teacher to which he had listened during his undergraduate days almost forty years before.

Preston stood with ease and dignity behind the rostrum, his face sallow from a recent severe attack of "congestive fever,"<sup>19</sup> and his red hair showing heavy streaks of gray.<sup>20</sup> He delivered his speech from manuscript--a practice unusual for him--in a quiet, conversational manner, articulating crisply and using little gesture. One student who heard the address recalled, "Anything like oratorical display then would have been out of order. [Preston] read . . . [his address] calmly, quietly, evidently with some emotion, just expressing the feelings with which he came into close contact with a body of young men, literary students."<sup>21</sup>

Preston endeavored to accomplish much more than this student could perhaps recall after the passage of fifty-five years. The address was indeed a speech of good will, but it carried an exposition of his philosophy of education, the policy of student government he intended to pursue, and the goals he hoped to achieve.

With the following words, Preston opened his brief address:

<sup>18</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, quoted in Charleston Mercury, January 8, 1846.

<sup>19</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, November 15, 1845.

<sup>20</sup>Carlisle (ed.), Addresses of J. H. Carlisle, 1825-1909, 187.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

"Entering upon the office to which the trustees have appointed me, I have thought it not inappropriate to present myself to you, in a somewhat formal way, and to make a few remarks which the occasion seems to justify."<sup>22</sup> In precise language, he next stated his specific purpose, putting both himself and his students into the picture.

The intimate relations which are hereafter to subsist between us, involving very grave responsibilities on my part, and the deepest interests of life on yours, will be the more readily and efficiently established by an exposition of my understanding of our most prominent, respective duties, and of the feelings and purposes with which I now assume mine.

Preston discussed first his personal situation and the feelings with which he faced the task that lay ahead of him. To his "deeply attentive and enlightened audience," he spoke "with much pathos and feeling."<sup>23</sup> What he said had the ring of genuine sincerity and modesty. "For many years," he declared, "I have been busy amidst the active pursuits of men, taking some part in affairs where the conflict of interest, the collision of intellect, and the tumult of strenuous and stormy passions left but little leisure for those calm and meditative employments which are the occupation within these walls." Thus, after an absence of thirty years, he was returning, "but in a new and trying condition." Referring next to his feelings of inadequacy to discharge the duties of his new office, the "Inspired Declaimer" declared:

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<sup>22</sup>Preston, Address to the Students of South Carolina College, 5. At least three South Carolina newspapers carried the complete text of Preston's address. See Charleston Courier, January 8, 1846; Charleston Mercury, January 8, 1846; Columbia Southern Chronicle, January 7, 1846.

<sup>23</sup>Charleston Courier, January 8, 1846.



I return . . . with sympathies in all your pursuits, to be sure, and tastes not entirely alienated from science and literature, but with a deep and fearful anxiety, that I may, indeed must be, unqualified to discharge the trust as it ought to be.

He would have "shrunk from this office," but he had seen fit to yield his own opinion to that of the trustees, for whose "judgment, experience, and knowledge of the Institution" he had an "entire deference." Preston wisely took a moment in passing to inspire the students with confidence in the board of trustees. He testified that he had not found anywhere, "in the chances of life"--even in the United States Senate--a "wiser, graver, or more highly endowed body." He made it clear to the students that he intended to maintain a perfect loyalty to the board, whose wishes he pledged himself to conform to with "implicit confidence." With disarming candor, Preston explained that he had "the more willingly" yielded to the judgment of the trustees in accepting the presidency since it had been tendered to "one who had differed with the State, on some important and exciting questions." To be made the "trusted agent" of the college "under such circumstances," he said, filled him with gratitude and oppressed him "with a painful sense of responsibility. In the swell of strong emotions which fill my heart, all vanity is quenched in the consciousness of inadequacy to make a suitable return."

Preston's utterances were calculated to command respect and build rapport. They bore the stamp of sincerity and earnestness, and their effectiveness was enhanced by Preston's ability to say the right thing in the right way.

Continuing his first topic, he spoke frankly of the special

qualifications he would bring to the office of president--qualifications which he thought might in some measure compensate for his deficiencies. They were three:

What I bring, gentlemen, to my station, and what I trust may in some sort make amends for my deficiencies, in other respects is, a deep and reverential love for this my Alma Mater,--a solemn sense of my duties, and I may be permitted to say, a love of letters, not altogether extinguished by contact with the world.

Preston implied a fourth qualification--a deep desire to instruct youth--as he spoke with heart-warming frankness of his desire to follow the example of Cicero, his hero of antiquity.

Nor am I insensible in adopting this course of life (as Cicero says), of seeing myself surrounded by a circle of ingenuous youths, and conciliating by laudable means their esteem and affection. There certainly cannot be a more important or honorable occupation than to instruct the rising generation in the duties to which they may hereafter be called.

It was happily becoming that the former "Cicero of the American Senate" and the new professor of belles lettres and elocution should apply to his own situation still "another sentiment" of his classical hero. That "sentiment" he drew from the opening page of De Oratore.

I have always soothed myself with the hope that there would come a time of quiet and repose, when I might return to the noble studies that occupy us here. I have fondly looked forward to the day, when having finished my career of active life, I might have the right to enjoy a lettered repose, freed from the toils of the bar and the painful pursuits of politics.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Cf. another translation: "To myself, also, there was a time when I thought that a season of relaxation, and for turning my thoughts again to the noble studies once pursued by both of us, would be fairly allowable, and be conceded by almost everyone; if the infinite labour of forensic business and the occupations of ambition should be brought to a stand, either by the completion of my course of honours, or by a decline of age." J. S. Watson (trans.), Cicero's De Oratore (London, 1891), 143.

Preston turned next to a discussion of the objectives of his undertaking, declaring:

It will be my constant effort to promote your studies, and to prepare you for the duties of life, (more important than life itself,) with such stores of learning as may be acquired here, but more especially with ardent and virtuous aspirations to acquit yourselves with honor hereafter.

In the discussion that followed, Preston sought to communicate to his young charges his philosophy of education--his conception of the nature and purposes of learning. His basic ideas were certainly not new but, word master that he was, he imparted to them a freshness. First, he said, "The immediate and ostensible object of our association is the pursuit of learning, and this might seem to be our sole purpose; but in truth, learning is only a means to the great end we have in view." This statement he amplified through figures. Learning was an "instrument" which would be "fashioned here"; the "armour" for life's battle. What were the ends of learning? Preston set them down as "the achievement of honorable and glorious victories, . . . the triumph of truth over error, of virtue over vice, of right over wrong." Knowledge was thus the handmaid of virtue. Still, Preston recognized that knowledge and virtue were not always indissolubly linked. He admitted the existence of "melancholy instances of great intellectual powers, united to acquisitions from the whole circle of learning, without a corresponding moral elevation." But these were "anomalies," Preston urged. "I rejoice to believe that . . . whatever enlarges and exalts the intellect, promotes, purifies, and invigorates the virtues of the heart." Driving his idea home with force, he declared, "If I did not believe in such a connexion, I would abandon myself to

indolence and despair." Continuing, he used an analogy to illustrate his premise:

Whatever enlightens the mind improves the heart; as the sun which illuminates the atmosphere warms the earth, and although it may happen that his beams are reflected from fields of ice, yet his general mission is to call forth whatever is useful and beautiful, and impregnate with vitality the whole body of nature.

Preston now sought to place knowledge in the larger context of the here and the hereafter--to characterize its relationship to the ultimate ends of man's existence. "To confer upon learning its just dignity and importance, it must be considered as subsidiary and auxiliary to the paramount ends of our being." Its focus must be upon man's "responsibilities in this life, and the awful responsibilities of a far more exceeding weight hereafter." Saying yes to life with all the force of his cultivated mind, Preston tightened his grip on the minds of the youth before him with "personal words" and images.

You are to be made intellectual men, that you may be fit moral agents; so that as you advance in learning, you may advance in the knowledge and appreciation of virtue, remembering always that the lamp which you light up is not a gaudy show . . . but is intended for a more useful and noble purpose, to show you, amidst the double night of error and passion which obscures your journey through life, the only ways of pleasantness and paths of peace.

Learning was "graceful" and knowledge was power, but learning and knowledge could attain their "true beauty and full power only when united to virtue." Such a union, moreover, was ennobled by piety. Thus, Preston could conclude, "Learning, morality, and religion--these are your great objects. These, in the right understanding of them, include all that is desirable." Such were Preston's views on the "object and purposes" of learning.

Before turning to his third topic, Preston sought to gain surer acceptance of his views. Using allusions from familiar sources--nature and the Bible--he appealed to the best in his young listeners.

If we can persuade you to entertain a corresponding idea of our duties, our task will be an easy one. We shall be joint laborers in the same field, cheered by the sure prospect of a luxuriant harvest. This, our seed time, will be a season of hope and joy, while we look forward with eager and confident anticipation to the glories of a rich harvest, and still farther to the garnering of it where there is no rust, and thieves cannot break through nor steal.

Keeping his composition coherent, Preston related his preceding ideas to those which followed. The "moral sentiments" to which he had alluded were of "immediate and vital consequence" in college living. "The good order and successful administration of the College, depends entirely upon their influences." Thus, Preston turned to his final topic--the policy he expected to pursue with regard to management of the student body.

Doubtless remembering from his own undergraduate days how his classmates sometimes broke the shackles of restraint, Preston resolved upon an untried, idealistic course. He determined to lend a "new tone" to the life of the college, treating his high-mettled boys as young gentlemen and appealing to their "honor and sense of right." His decision is a monument to his flexibility and shrewd good sense.

Appealing to honor and duty, Preston first explained the relationship of law to human social behavior.

You have passed the period of coercion, and already are moral agents. In all communities laws avail but little without a prevailing sentiment to sustain and carry them out in their true spirit. "What is the value of law without morality," is true everywhere, but most emphatically true here; our government resolves itself almost



entirely into an appeal to the sense of honor and duty, without which our laws are nugatory, and their impotent penalties carry no sanction.

Preston appealed directly to his auditors. "You cannot, young gentlemen,--you ought not to be governed by mere dint of law,--you must feel that there are other and higher roles that it imposes, . . . laws in your own bosoms, written on your hearts,--tha penalty for disobedience to which, is the consciousness of wrong,--and the reward of obedience, the consciousness of right."

Laboring against the counter attraction of a chilly room, Preston scanned the rows of earnest eyes before him, explaining that he did not "indulge in the chimerical expectation that a moral discipline can be so far enforced as to supercede an occasional application of penal laws." His "observation of life" allowed no such hope. Preston left no fuzziness in his utterances.

Acts of discipline must occur, and when the occasion requires them, they will be firmly and promptly applied,--but what we do calculate on, is the prevalence of a pervading sentiment, that will render such a necessity infrequent,--a sentiment which will inspire more fear of offence than of punishment.

Realizing the intimate relationship between work habits and moral behavior, Preston urged the students to apply themselves assiduously to their studies. He first observed that "The impulsiveness and impatience belonging to your time of life, naturally make the degree of exertion and industry requisite to your proper advancement, irksome and painful to you." Using antithesis to achieve vividness, Preston contrasted indolence and industry. "Indolence presents herself to the young,--aye! and to the old,--in a thousand seducing forms.



Industry is of a harsh and crabbed aspect." Around the one lurked "all the ills of life," while the other lead eventually "to those elevations to which the noble spirit aspires." Echoing his eulogy on Legare, Preston went on to point out that "genius . . . is plumed for its highest flights, and trained to them by industry." Without industry no great achievement "ever has or ever can be effected."

Citing examples to illustrate, he declared:

It is an utter mistake to imagine that any endowment can dispense with labour. . . . We have heard of the forest-born Demosthenes, . . . of "Fancy's child / Warbling his native wood notes wild, . . . of "the blind old man of Scio's rocky isle [Homer]." These were men of genius, unquestionably,--but [Patrick] Henry, and Shakespeare, and Homer, were also men of labor,--they had the blessing of inspiration, but the blessing came to them after they had wrestled all night.

Before concluding, Preston spelled out his wishes respecting interpersonal relations and, in so doing, revealed himself as the genuine, patriarchal governor which he actually became. He hoped that his relationships with the students would be "characterized by the courtesy becoming gentlemen," and that his government would be "animated by the vigilance and tempered by the affection of a parent." It was his wish, moreover, that both his official and social relations with his students would be such that in later life they would "remember the college with affection" and him "with no indifferent feelings."

Preston closed with an appeal to the Diet, a practice common in that time, yet unusual for him:

Young gentlemen, if I were better qualified than I am for this office, I know how vain my efforts must be, even with the assistance of my able colleagues and your zealous co-operation, without the gracious protection

and help of our Heavenly Father. To Him, then, and to His beneficent providence, I humbly and earnestly commend the issue of this undertaking.

Preston's effort was greeted with praise. The Courier commented, "The Address was delivered with much pathos and feeling; and while it commanded the deepest attention of the enlightened audience, also elicited their unqualified approbation."<sup>25</sup> Fortunately, the student body left a unique record of its impression. On the evening following Preston's address the students assembled in the college chapel and adopted unanimously a resolution that "a Committee be appointed to request of our Hon. President, a copy of his eloquent and appropriate Inaugural for publication." The committee submitted the request to Preston, along with their reasons for making it.

Believing that your Address will be read by the public, with as much interest as was manifested during its delivery; and under the sure conviction that an address, abounding as it does, with so many able and instructive precepts, should not only be perused by every Student of the College, but treasured up as a lasting memorial of the relation in which we stand to our President, we earnestly solicit your compliance with the . . . [request].<sup>26</sup>

Preston's inaugural may be characterized as one of acute good sense. Blanding idealism and practicality, Preston said the fitting thing clearly and forcefully, both from the standpoint of delivery and of composition. La Borde once wrote of Preston, "I think his power of adaptation is very great, and with a facility rarely possessed, he can accomodate himself to the occasion."<sup>27</sup> Of all his

<sup>25</sup>Charleston Courier, January 8, 1846.

<sup>26</sup>Preston, Address to the Students of the South Carolina College, 3.

<sup>27</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 290.

published addresses, Preston's inaugural perhaps best exemplifies the adaptive power which La Borde ascribes to him. A nice compounding of the esthetic and the utilitarian, his utterances were calculated to make crystal clear the policies he intended to pursue, and to inspire confidence in the new administration. He dealt with ideas of weight, and set them forth in a style suited to him, his listeners, and the occasion. More important in this rhetorical situation (and Preston so recognized it) was the role of the speaker's character and personality. His address was studded with indicators of his intelligence, integrity, and good social attitude--indicators which add up to a cultivated, earnest, sincere, and genuine human being. Preston's effort was in one sense an unrestrained outpouring of his own mind and spirit, and this quality of his address did not go unnoticed. The editor of the Mercury, in an absorbing editorial on the speech, wrote, "How very seldom do you encounter in the world a man of great abilities, acquirements, experience, who will unmask his mind, unbutton his brain; and pour forth in careless and picturesque phrase, all the results of his studies and observation; his knowledge of men, books, and nature."<sup>28</sup>

In his first year as president, Preston justified the confidence placed in him by the trustees and fulfilled the high expectations attending his inaugural. O'Neill wrote enthusiastically of the early period of the Preston administration:

The college sprang forward from its lethargy; its walls were crowded with students. The president was known to be an extraordinary man. All who could receive the

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<sup>28</sup>Charleston Mercury, January 8, 1846.

benefit of his instruction were eager to do so. Many a young man, as in the days of Dr. Maxcy; caught the enthusiasm of their gifted instructor. Eloquence was no longer regarded as not worthy of note or pursuit. The young learned to speak from the daily example of the first of orators.<sup>29</sup>

In his first semi-annual report to the trustees, Preston declared that "feeble health and inexperience" had prevented him from discharging the duties of his office with "the assiduity and efficiency they require," but that the deficiencies of his department had been "compensated by the zealous labours" of his "more learned and experienced colleagues." Also, Preston reported "a fair degree of order, morality and industry" on the part of the students.

Preston found his own work as teacher and administrator pleasant and rewarding, writing to Thompson before year's end:

I am uncommon [y] well, and getting on very swimmingly with the college which never was in a better condition. In short it is a real pleasure to be associated with these boys, and I cannot imagine a more agreeable way of life. It is quiet [sic] in some sort literary--& I have a feeling of being useful to the State. These are elements of happiness. . . . I feel that I am at anchor in a pleasant harbour.<sup>30</sup>

The success of Preston's administration was in no small measure the result of a capable faculty which, as one historian of the college believes, "was at its strongest at this time."<sup>31</sup>

Of the eight faculty members, two of the strongest were Francis Lieber and James Thornevell, who were at the peak of their

<sup>29</sup>O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 534.

<sup>30</sup>Preston to Thompson, Columbia, November, 1846, Waddy Thompson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>31</sup>Hollis, South Carolina College, I, 149.

careers.<sup>32</sup> Lieber, the German-born political scientist, with a Ph. D. degree from Jena University (1820), had filled the chair of history and economy since 1835. Stout of stature, cheerful, brilliant in conversation, he enjoyed a high reputation as a teacher. Besides, he was by 1847 an internationally known scholar who had published a number of widely acclaimed works. During Preston's administration, Lieber was writing On Civil Liberty and Self Government (2 vols., 1853).<sup>33</sup> Thornwell, a graduate of the college who became the second alumnus to serve as president, had served as professor of metaphysics from 1837 to 1840. In 1841 he returned as college chaplain and professor of moral philosophy, positions he held until his election as president in 1851. A learned and eloquent Presbyterian divine, Thornwell was also an able teacher.<sup>34</sup> In La Borda's opinion, "as a teacher, few, if any, have equalled, certainly none have surpassed him."<sup>35</sup> William H. Ellet, who was elected to the chair of chemistry, minerology, and geology in 1835, was also an outstanding teacher. A Latin scholar and mathematician, as well as chemist, Ellet so impressed Thomas Cooper that the latter pronounced himself "a fool in comparison." He was an engaging lecturer, who spoke without notes, at a whirlwind

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 149-150.

<sup>33</sup>Dictionary of American Biography, XI, 236-238; The Garnet and Black, Student Yearbook for 1899, 2 vols. (Columbia, 1899), I, 66; E. L. Green, A History of the University of South Carolina (Columbia, 1916), 60-61.

<sup>34</sup>Dictionary of American Biography, XVIII, 507-508; La Borda, History of the South Carolina College, 331-352.

<sup>35</sup>La Borda, History of the South Carolina College, 263-264.



rate. So popular was he that "it was not a rare spectacle to see his [Laboratory] benches crowded with a large portion of the intelligence" of Columbia. La Borde credits the ambidexterous Ellet with making the first gunpowder produced in the United States.<sup>36</sup> Preston himself rounded out the corps of truly able teachers, and La Borde and Henry gave to the faculty "additional strength."<sup>37</sup>

As in the days of Maxcy, the curriculum during Preston's administration was heavily classical, though the pure sciences received a fresh impetus. The studies of the freshman year were still devoted largely to the Latin and Greek classics. The sophomore year included, along with more Latin and Greek classics, trigonometry, geometry, "Heat, Light, and Electricity," and Whately's Logic and Rhetoric. In 1848 elocution was added to the sophomore's studies. The junior year was devoted largely to pure science, as well as rhetoric and belles lettres, with some attention to moral and political philosophy. Seniors studied Cicero's ethical works, select Greek plays, astronomy, civil engineering, political economy, philosophy of the mind, criticism and elocution, chemistry, geology, and mineralogy, and sacred literature.<sup>38</sup> At Preston's suggestion, "a separate course in Human and General Physiology" was added in 1848 to the studies of the junior year, and a course in "agricultural chemistry" was added to the senior year.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 266.

<sup>37</sup>Hollis, South Carolina College, I, 150.

<sup>38</sup>Catalogue of South Carolina College, 1846, 1847, 1848, 1849, 1850, 1851.

<sup>39</sup>Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, May 6, 1846, November 29, 1847.



As professor of belles lettres and elocution, Preston taught only advanced courses, though during his administration he broke precedent by meeting "the Sophomores once each week, to hear exercises in elocution." His object, which he explained to the trustees, was rather to extend his "acquaintance & establish sympathies in the College, for purposes of government, than for instruction."<sup>40</sup> During the nine months term, which began on the first Monday of October and ended "about the 1st of July,"<sup>41</sup> Preston met the junior and senior classes daily, and conducted all of the weekly rhetorical exercises.

The following is a typical report of his teaching activities:

The Seniors have recited to me on Blair's Lectures and Schlegel's History of Literature--They have declaimed before me exercises in speaking--& have spoken original compositions on the stage. . . . The Junior class have recited to me from Kame's Elements of Criticism. . . . They have also had regular exercises before me in Elocution--and one half of the class submit compositions to me each week. I meet the Sophomores once each week, to hear exercises in elocution. . . .<sup>42</sup>

Preston wrought only one minor change in his own department during his administration, discarding Kame's Elements of Criticism because it was, in his opinion, "a book of much more pretension than merit." With masterly good sense, he persisted in his practice of teaching the principles of public speaking through exercises in oral reading (declamation) and original speech composition, even though the

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., May 6, 1846.

<sup>41</sup>Catalogue of South Carolina College, 1848.

<sup>42</sup>Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, May 6, 1846. Preston's semi-annual reports to the trustees for the full six years of his administration indicate that there was no basic change made in his teaching schedule.

enrollment by 1850 had so increased that he found himself examining forty "Senior oratorical compositions per week."<sup>43</sup> Such were the stresses of his increasing duties that he reported in May, 1850, "By the end of my 11:00 o'clock recitation, I am sometimes not able to rise from my chair or get across to the Chapel without the assistance of some members of the class."<sup>44</sup>

By all accounts, Preston was one of the most brilliant teachers in the ante-bellum history of the college, giving to rhetoric a stature it had not enjoyed since the death of Maxcy in 1820. The mainspring of his power was his fondness for teaching. He was heard to say, while president of the college, "I believe teaching is my vocation, and I would that I had spent my whole life in striving, like Socrates, to educate the young."<sup>45</sup> Preston's contemporaries did not claim for him "profound learning" nor "exact scholarship." His handwriting was almost indecipherable, and his spelling notoriously poor. These deficiencies were overshadowed by his assets, characterized by one of his colleagues as "the rich fruits of a large experience, . . . a varied knowledge, a refined and cultivated intellect, and a prestige enviable and commanding."<sup>46</sup>

Preston brought to the teaching of belles lettres a unique background. His acquaintance with polite literature, begun in early

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., May 8, 1850.

<sup>45</sup>Quoted in Preston, A Sketch of Mrs. Elizabeth Russell, 43.

<sup>46</sup>La Borda, History of the South Carolina College, 295.

boyhood under Whaley, was said to have been "remarkably extensive." By virtue of his European travels, he knew personally many of the literary notables of the day. He possessed a keen artistic sense, and, while traveling in Europe, had "allowed no work of art to escape a most careful and critical examination."<sup>47</sup> Thus, Rion, a student of Preston could say:

Others, no doubt, may, in particular departments of literature, have been more accurate and plodding; but none were more appreciative. Others could render one of Cicero's orations in purer latin, but none could appreciate and portray the beauties of those magnificent productions more forcibly. While others might be plodding at the distinction between an ablative and an accusative, Mr. Preston would be serving up a banquet of intellectual and aesthetic delights.<sup>48</sup>

Preston's general classroom method was to use the textbook as a point of departure. Miller noted that "He did not slavishly confine himself to the textbook, but would branch out and seek truth and its illustrations from far and near."<sup>49</sup> Similarly, one of Preston's students speaks of the Inspired Declaimer's "unstudied talks to his classes," which "were worth more than what was in the textbooks, Blair and Kames."<sup>50</sup>

As might be expected, Preston's forte as a teacher was elocution, in the graces of which he was himself a master. In his classroom, the man whom Legare termed "the greatest declaimer in the world," demonstrated enthusiastically the principles of his subject.

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<sup>47</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 4.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>49</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., XI (December, 1899), 586.

<sup>50</sup>Le Roy F. Youmans, Address Delivered in the Hall of the House of Representatives Before the Alumni of South Carolina College, December 6, 1881 (Columbia, 1882), 36.

He declaimed both orations and poetry, holding his charges enchained. Typically, he rose from his chair, like his old mentor, Whaley, and recited from memory. Rion recalled Preston's animated reading of Patrick Henry's "Liberty or Death" speech. "How he filled us with admiration and despair, as in teaching us elocution, he would repeat, 'They tell us, sir, that we are weak, unable to cope with so formidable an adversary.'" <sup>51</sup> Another alumnus of the college recalled a revealing incident from his days under Preston. After a member of his class had read Burns' "Highland Mary," Preston observed "'That is very nice; but this is my conception.'" Then, feeble though he was, he rose to his full height, repeated the poem, and "at the end sank back exhausted. It was a marvellous flash of expiring genius." <sup>52</sup>

Not the least of his strengths as a teacher was his masterful command of the English tongue. He communicated always with vividness and intelligibility. Of his lectures, Rion declared, "No matter what his subject, he made himself understood;" <sup>53</sup> and La Borde thought one of Preston's chief virtues as a classroom teacher was his "clear, perspicuous and picturesque language." <sup>54</sup>

In sum, just as Preston had been the fortunate beneficiary of Nancy's superior teaching, so now were other sons of Carolina the beneficiaries of his own master-teaching, which was profoundly influenced by the example of his former teacher. What one of his students

<sup>51</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 8.

<sup>52</sup>The Garnet and Black, I, 64.

<sup>53</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 6.

<sup>54</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 295.

said of him, Preston might have applied with equal appropriateness to Maxcy.

We saw him pre-eminent in the lecture-room. At the feet of this Gamaliel, we learnt the lessons of sweet philosophy which he so much loved. Guided by his experience, we traced to this source the wonderful powers of the orator, and saw the great masters of his art equalled [by] your instructor.<sup>55</sup>

One of the notable features of Preston's administration was the great increase in the size of the student body which resulted chiefly from his national reputation and his able instruction in elocution. The enrollment soared from 122 in 1845, the year before Preston's inauguration, to 171 in 1847, and to 230 in 1848.<sup>56</sup>

In 1849 the number reached a peak of 237, a high water mark not again equalled until 1905. Although the number of students dropped to 195 in 1850 and to 184 in 1851, a slump partially caused by suspensions following disciplinary troubles, it was even then at a point higher than it had been prior to Preston's administration.<sup>57</sup>

Notable, also, was the great increase of students from other Southern states. Prior to Preston's presidency there were ordinarily no more than "a dozen students a year from all other states combined," but in 1848 the number had reached thirty-five, of which ten were from Alabama, seven from Georgia, six from Mississippi, three from North Carolina, three from Louisiana, and one from each of the states of

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<sup>55</sup>C. H. Simonton, quoted in Columbia Tri-Weekly Southern Guardian, May 26, 1860.

<sup>56</sup>Green, A History of the University of South Carolina, 437; Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, November 24, 1847; December 1, 1848.

<sup>57</sup>Hollis, South Carolina College, 150.

Florida, Virginia, Tennessee, and Texas.<sup>58</sup>

As enrollment climbed, an ever greater strain was placed upon classroom and dormitory facilities, as well as upon the small teaching staff. Faculty changes were made, the most notable being the replacement of Ellet in 1848 by R. T. Brumby of the University of Alabama.<sup>59</sup> But no additional professors were hired. Even though Preston sought to solve the problem of classroom and dormitory space, the burden of his reports to the trustees for the years 1847, 1848, and 1849 was the seriousness of the space problem. In November, 1847, he reported that the number of students "for the session about to begin" would be "from 210 to 230," and that of the total number, sixty would be without the "usual accommodations."<sup>60</sup> The overflow of students found living quarters in town, and the president and his wife, now childless,<sup>61</sup> regularly accommodated two boys in their home--"sons of special friends."<sup>62</sup> The trustees responded promptly to Preston's request for additional space, and a special appropriation of \$20,000 by the legislature made possible the construction of two new buildings, which bore the names

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<sup>58</sup>Columbia Daily Telegraph, January 17, 1848.

<sup>59</sup>Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, December 1, 1848;

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., November 24, 1847.

<sup>61</sup>Preston's daughter Sally, "A beautiful and accomplished girl, just budding into womanhood," died in 1846, shortly after Preston assumed his post as President of the College. O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, II, 534.

<sup>62</sup>J. H. Hudson, quoted in Brooks, South Carolina Bench and Bar, I, 246. Hudson, an alumnus of the college, also observed that Preston and his "worthy wife" were always "kind hearted and sympathized with needy students striving for an education."



Harper and Legare.<sup>63</sup> This brought the total number of buildings to ten, including three faculty houses and the college library, and solved the space problem. Preston reported to the trustees in November, 1849, "The college is very commodious and comfortable, with a capacity now for 250 students."<sup>64</sup>

With equal earnestness Preston attacked other administrative problems which beset him. Two of the most nettlesome were the students' dissatisfaction with "steward's hall" (the college dining room) and the inefficiency in the management of the bursary. After the death of the first bursar in 1846, it was learned that he had embezzled funds, making "private purchases of venison, wine, cigars, and other delicacies" from college maintenance funds.<sup>65</sup> He was followed by William Anderson, a bibulous blade who proved completely unsatisfactory. In 1848, Preston recommending Colonel A. H. Gladden, a Mexican war hero, for the office. Amiable, conscientious, and quick-minded, Gladden ran the office efficiently, and Preston reported in 1849: "Under Gladden, the excellent Bursar, the Commons has been signalized by a degree of good order and decency heretofore unknown."<sup>66</sup> Preston also took a personal interest in improving the quality of the food. At his behest, the board of visitors "dined twice" in the Commons during their visit to the campus for the senior examinations in 1848,

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<sup>63</sup>Hollis, South Carolina College, 151.

<sup>64</sup>Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, November 28, 1849.

<sup>65</sup>Hollis, South Carolina College, 153.

<sup>66</sup>Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, November 28, 1849.

and reported that they "were well satisfied with the excellent fare provided."<sup>67</sup> The president himself, on more than one occasion, sampled the food and approved its quality. But the finicky boys, who paid \$2.50 per week for board, continued to complain, and in 1850 Preston tried another scheme. He invoked the aid of five students to act as a committee to inform him "of the state and condition of the Commons--whether the fare be good & palatable, if there be any defects or deficiencies what they are--whether there is any general dissatisfaction and if so the cause of it--whether in short there be any desirable and practicable improvements."<sup>68</sup> The outcome of this investigation is not known, but it is certain that Preston taxed his ingenuity in trying to solve the problem of "the commons"--the "Pandora's box of South Carolina College."<sup>69</sup>

In the management of the student body, Preston was fully as successful as was anticipated when he took office. To "graduate gentlemen" was his declared aim, and his own "elegance of manners, high tone, irreproachable character, and extraordinary powers of conversation, made him an exemplar fit for young men to pattern after." Besides, he was credited with being able to "pursue that nice line of

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., December 1, 1848. Following Gladden's appointment in 1848, Lieber dined in the Commons one month, and reported to Preston, "Never since I have been connected with this institution has been the management of the hall, the conduct of the students and their feeling toward the bursar so satisfactory as it is at the moment." Lieber to Preston, Columbia, November 28, 1848, Francis Lieber Papers (South Caroliniana Library).

<sup>68</sup>Preston to Messrs. Bacon, Govan, McPheeters, Richardson, and Rion, Columbia, 1850, Miscellaneous Records of the South Carolina College, South Caroliniana Library.

<sup>69</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 11-12.

discipline necessary to restrain, while it did not provoke, the high strung youth under his charge."<sup>70</sup> He managed shrewdly to make the individual student feel that "the character of the college" was "part of his own."<sup>71</sup> He also secured the affections of the student body. Perry wrote that he "won the affections of all the students and endeared them to him in a remarkable degree."<sup>72</sup> He did not hesitate to consult students on matters wherein he knew they were qualified to judge. Ruling as a kindly "patriarch," he

made the troubles and trials of "his boys" in a measure his own; he was ever ready to assist or advise those in distress; he administered the severest reproof in such a manner as to inflict no wound; his fireside and table had always a welcome for the student; in holidays those, whose homes were not accessible, could find one at the Presidential mansion. . . .<sup>73</sup>

In sum, the students both liked and respected him.

Preston's successful supervision of the student body attracted national attention. The Philadelphia United States Gazette observed in 1847, "The moral name of . . . [South Carolina College] is higher than it ever was before, while the supervising spirit has infused much of that temper and honor and excellence which pre-eminently distinguishes . . . [The president]."<sup>74</sup> A similar tribute was paid Preston by the

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>71</sup>Columbia Daily Telegraph, November 20, 1847.

<sup>72</sup>Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men, II, 57. See, also, Yorkville Enquirer, May 31, 1860.

<sup>73</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 12.

<sup>74</sup>Quoted in Columbia Daily Telegraph, November 20, 1847.

Macon Messenger in 1849,<sup>75</sup> and in 1850 an out-of-state correspondent of the Columbia Daily Telegraph offered the opinion that Preston had succeeded in establishing "a tone between the students and professors-- a kindly relation and confidence between them, such as has never existed before, and as we have not seen in any other American College."<sup>76</sup>

Perhaps the highest tribute to Preston's abilities as an educator was paid by Calhoun, who availed himself of Preston's influence and power as a teacher, sending his son William to the college during Preston's administration. Though the two men differed on questions of statecraft, they were in harmony on matters educational, and the magnanimity of the one was reciprocated by an equal magnanimity of the other, with the result that the ugly breach between them was healed before the death of either. William enrolled as a sophomore in 1848. His statesman father visited the college in December, 1848, and Preston arranged "a most striking and impressive" reception for him. The tribute of "young Carolina" was staged in the College Chapel before a "dense throng" of excited students and townspeople. The Telegraph reported:

At 11 o'clock, Mr. Calhoun entered the Chapel, leaning on the arm of Hon. William C. Preston, the gifted President of the College--who with his accustomed dignity and grace, placed him on his right hand on the rostrum.

When the wild applause had subsided, W. W. Wallace, a member of the Senior Class, one of Preston's best student orators, gave a brief, but moving welcome, terming Calhoun the "great embodiment of those

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<sup>75</sup>Macon Messenger, quoted in ibid., February 13, 1847.

<sup>76</sup>Columbia Daily Telegraph, May 14, 1850.

solid [South Carolina] virtues." In a feeble voice Calhoun responded, urging the students to be "diligent in the acquisition of knowledge," so that they might become "good citizens, able and ready to protect the Constitution . . . by asserting and maintaining at all hazards, the rights of the South."<sup>77</sup>

On yet another occasion Preston acted generously toward his old colleague. Following a student disturbance in April, 1849, Preston wrote to Calhoun that William had "signalized himself" by refusing to participate, and had thereby obtained "the approbation of the governors of the Institution and the respect and esteem of his fellow students." Preston concluded his heart-warming note with these words, "In short my dear sir he is a very noble youth and . . . will be a great comfort and delight to you. It is a very particular pleasure to Mrs. Preston & myself to be able to give you this assurance."<sup>78</sup>

Under an ever-increasing burden of duties, Preston's health began to crumble in 1849. Added to his regular college duties were those resulting from his election in 1846 to the board of regents of the Smithsonian Institution. Preston became a leader in the deliberations of the board, and the office demanded additional correspondence as well as an energy-draining trip to Washington each year for the

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<sup>77</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," *loc. cit.*, XII (January, 1900). 42-43; La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 447-448; Columbia Daily Telegraph, December 8, 1848.

<sup>78</sup>Preston to Calhoun, n.p., May, 1849, John C. Calhoun Papers, Clemson College Library, Clemson, South Carolina. This letter appears to have been Preston's last to Calhoun.



annual meeting of the board.<sup>79</sup> In January, 1849, Preston was stricken with an acute attack of influenza which almost proved fatal, and the board of trustees urged him to seek the recovery of his health "by a voyage to Europe." He declined the offer, thinking himself sufficiently strong to continue his work, but the board, unconvinced, requested that he "recade from his duties" until October 1, "for the purpose of restoring his health." The reins of government were handed to Lieber for the interim period, and Preston repaired to Lexington, Virginia, where he spent the summer in recuperation at the home of a relative, Virginia's Governor James McDowell.<sup>80</sup> In November Preston was able to resume his duties, though William Gilmore Simms had written in May, "Preston is hors de combat, or nearly so--the wreck (physically) of his former self."<sup>81</sup>

So feeble had Preston's health become by May, 1850 that he submitted his resignation. The board accepted it with reluctance, at the same time adopting a resolution commending Preston for discharging the duties of his trust with "signal dignity and ability, and with . . . earnest, unwearied faithfulness, even under the pressure of disease."

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<sup>79</sup>G. Brown Goode, "The Origin of the National Scientific and Educational Institutions of the United States," Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1889 (Washington, 1890), 124; Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, May 8, 1847; Smithsonian Institution: Documents Relative to Its Origin and History, 2 vols. (Washington, 1901), I, 438.

<sup>80</sup>Columbia Daily Telegraph, January 30, February 5, July 17, 1849; Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, May 9, November 28, 1849; Freidel, Francis Lieber, 249.

<sup>81</sup>Simms to William Hodgson, Woodlands, South Carolina, May 9, 1849, in Mary C. Simms Oliphant et al. (eds.), Letters of William Gilmore Simms, 5 vols. (Columbia, 1952-1955), II, 523-524.



A period of rest again restored his health temporarily, and with characteristic tenacity he withdrew his letter of resignation, declaring that he believed he could "go on with the administration of the college." The board approved his decision, expressing their "satisfaction" at the same time.<sup>82</sup> Preston was back in office in time to participate in the December commencement, witnessing the conferring of sixty-four baccalaureate degrees, a record-breaking number for the college.

Preston's illness forced him to neglect various administrative duties. The most significant repercussion was an increase in disciplinary problems, for "good order in the college was . . . inextricably linked with the vigorous activity of the president."<sup>83</sup> Most of the problems were of the usual character, such as infraction of the rule against partaking of strong drink while on campus. One case of riotous conduct, which left the only serious blotch on Preston's administrative record, deserves special comment.

The incident was precipitated in the spring of 1850 by a dispute between the junior class, numbering over seventy, and Brumby, the chemistry professor. Returning to his classes after a brief illness, Brumby arranged with Thornwell, who expected to be absent for a few days on a trip, to use Thornwell's class hours for make-up recitations in chemistry. When Brumby made the announcement to his class, he was greeted, in Preston's words, "with improper demonstrations of

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<sup>82</sup>Columbia Daily Telegraph, May 14, 1850; Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, November 27, 1850; James Louis Petigru to Susan Petigru King, Philadelphia, September 12, 1850, in Carson, Life, Letters and Speeches of James Louis Petigru, 285.

<sup>83</sup>Hollis, South Carolina College, I, 154.

disapprobation by scraping on the floor." Whereupon Brumby, the only unpopular member of the staff, "characterized their conduct as childish," and renewed his order. The class held a meeting the following day and determined not to attend the extra classes. Preston then summoned the spokesmen of the class to his office and demanded "a candid and explicit account of their reasons" for their recalcitrant behavior. He was told that Brumby's order was "not legal," and that Brumby "had used offensive language and in a harsh manner," for which an apology was due "before they would attend his recitations." These points were discussed freely and at length, but Preston supported Brumby, maintaining the order was legal and suggesting that the class was perhaps either "mistaken or over strenuous" as to the supposed offence. But the irate juniors, determined to teach Brumby to distinguish between "hauteur and dignity," stood firm in their decision. The first make-up session was to be held on Saturday morning. At "morning prayers" on Saturday, Preston sought again to restore peace, assuring the juniors "in the most emphatic way" that Brumby had requested him to "disavow, in his behalf, any intention of offence or insult." All efforts failed to restore harmony and the juniors did not attend make-up classes.<sup>84</sup>

Preston then called the class before the faculty to answer for their disobedience, and each culprit maintained that he acted because of "a concert with the class." Preston and the faculty

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<sup>84</sup>Preston to Governor Whitmarsh Seabrook, South Carolina College, April 17, 1850, in James H. Rion, South Carolina College, 1846-1851: A Scrapbook, Containing College Catalogues, Addresses, and Newspaper Clippings, n.p., n.d.

forthwith suspended the class until the following June. On the evening following the faculty order, a "riotous scene" took place, which has been vividly described by a member of the junior class.<sup>85</sup>

The expelled students got on a spree, and, assembling near the Maxcy monument, saturated over seventy copies of Draper's Chemistry with camphine, and, piling them up, made a huge bonfire, around which they indulged in dance and song. All the college gathered to witness the scene, until the venerable Preston arrived and dispersed the boisterous assembly.<sup>86</sup>

Preston reported that the rioters offered him "no insult or indignity," but were determined to carry out their planned "programme" which consisted of the burning of the chemistry texts, a satirical song on Brumby, and "the death and burial of Chemistry, to be fully enacted with liquor and firecrackers." To the Governor, Whitmarsh Seabrook, Preston wrote, "The junior class, consisting of about sixty, is entirely broken up."<sup>87</sup> The experience was a trying one for Preston, who told one of his nieces, "I would rather drive an earthquake with a team of volcanoes than a set of wild boys."<sup>88</sup>

By November, 1851, Preston's health was such that he thought himself "totally unfitted" for the duties of his office. He therefore tendered his resignation, accompanied by the following poignant request:

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.; Columbia Daily Telegraph, May 13, 1850.

<sup>86</sup>Joshua H. Hudson, quoted in Brooks, South Carolina Bench and Bar, I, 246.

<sup>87</sup>Preston to Seabrook, South Carolina College, April 17, 1850, in Rion, South Carolina College: A Scrapbook.

<sup>88</sup>Virginia P. Carrington, quoted in Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 142.

As a student, Trustee, or Professor, I have been connected with our college for more than forty years, & now upon this enforced disconnection with it, I respectfully ask from your Board as a consolation and solace to a dilapidated old age, such a limited access to the Library & use of its books as may not interfere with the general purposes of this noble Institution. I tender to the Board my grateful, respectful, and friendly farewell.<sup>89</sup>

La Borde thought Preston's six year term as president "one of the most brilliant in the history of the College,"<sup>90</sup> and the Telegraph credited Preston with "almost re-creating" the college.<sup>91</sup> Unquestionably, his contributions were great. In a remarkably brief period, his presence had almost doubled the number of students, compelling a substantial increase in physical and instructional facilities. He placed a new emphasis on the cultivation of oratory, and gave a "new tone" to student government.

Other important improvements were either inaugurated or suggested by Preston. At his request a Board of Visitors was instituted, the campus was terraced, a college "fire company" was organized, and a new office was established "for the purpose of keeping the Records of the College within the College."<sup>92</sup> He also succeeded in persuading a number of affluent Columbia citizens to establish scholarships for needy college students. He failed, however, in his efforts to secure the establishment of a law chair in the college--an improvement for

<sup>89</sup>Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, November 27, 1851.

<sup>90</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 296.

<sup>91</sup>Columbia Daily Telegraph, May 15, 1850.

<sup>92</sup>Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, November 24, 29, 1847, May 4, 1848, November 28, 1849, November 27, 1850.

which he presented a most cogent case.<sup>93</sup>

Preston's connection with the college was not broken by his resignation from the office of president. Nor did his interest in the well-being of his alma mater wane. He was again elected a member of the board of trustees, serving until December, 1857, when he resigned because of a lingering illness. Until his resignation, he attended the meetings of the board regularly, and assumed a leading role in the deliberations of the board.

During his final year as a member of the board, Preston dedicated himself to a plan for democratic reform of the college. His six years as president had convinced him of the need for liberalizing the college so as to extend the opportunities of a higher education to the middle classes. The idea of converting the college into a university had engaged his attention as early as 1849,<sup>94</sup> and his suggestion of a law professorship was a step in that direction. Yet he seems to have realized that he was ahead of his times, urging his idea no further. When, however, the movement for democratic reform of the educational system of the state extended to colleges in the late 1850's, Preston submitted to the board a series of resolutions providing for "essential modifications" in the college organization. His resolutions suggested (1) that the "curriculum of studies should

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<sup>93</sup>Columbia Daily Telegraph, December 19, 1848; Columbia South Carolinian, July 8, 1857; Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, November 29, 1848. There were at least four such scholarships established during Preston's administration. Evidently, too, they were the first.

<sup>94</sup>Simms to Hodgson, Woodlands, South Carolina, May 9, 1849, in Oliphant et al. (ed.), Letters of William Gilmore Simms, II, 523.



be expanded, so as to require many more professors or schools"; and (2) that "the selection of the schools shall be optional on the part of the applicants for college." B. F. Perry, a member of the board, seconded Preston's resolutions, and a committee of five was appointed to study the matter and draw up a report.<sup>95</sup>

The plan failed because of opposition from the conservative lords of the low country, who wished to preserve the aristocratic character of the institution. Preston carried his campaign to the legislature. At his suggestion, Perry, a member of the Senate, introduced in that body a bill to achieve the same purpose, and Preston "exerted his influence" in favor of it. Since the legislature was dominated by the low country powers, however, the university plan failed to pass. Not until after the Civil War, during the provisional governorship of Perry, was the college finally converted to a university.<sup>96</sup> Thus, to Preston belongs the credit for setting in motion the idea of the first fundamental reorganization of the South Carolina College.

When he resigned he was deluged with tributes, among which was the following, paid by James H. Thornwell:

the Board is reluctant to lose that prudent counsel which is the soul of action and which it is the prerogative of age to import. That God may bless him and make his last days as tranquil and serene as his earlier ones were

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<sup>95</sup>Preston to Lieber, Columbia, May 28, 1857, Francis Lieber Papers (South Caroliniana Library); Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men, II, 59; Columbia South Carolinian, September 19, 1857.

<sup>96</sup>Kibler, Benjamin F. Perry, 308-309; Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men, II, 59.



gorgeous and brilliant is the sincere prayer of his friends and companions with whom he has long been associated in public and we trust will still be long connected in private relations.<sup>97</sup>

In the closing years of Preston's life he realized in abundant measure Thornwell's aspirations for him. The lettered patriarch of the college became the lettered patriarch of Columbia, pursuing the Ciceronian ideal of a "lettered repose." To the noble ends of learning and morality, toward which he had urged his students, Preston added to his own life the third end--piety. After the deaths of his daughter Sally and his mother in 1846, Thornwell had written him a long letter beseeching him to fortify himself rather with the "promises of God" than with "the lessons of philosophy." Thornwell told him candidly, "In the eyes of your Christian friends there is but one thing you lack [evangelical religion]," and entreated him, "all venerate you, multitudes love you, and God commands you to give the glory to Him."<sup>98</sup> Preston heeded Thornwell's entreaty, becoming "a humble worshipper" in the Trinity Episcopal Church of Columbia, and immersing himself in the Christian scriptures.<sup>99</sup> He served as a vestryman, and in 1857 was elected a delegate to the Diocesan Convention of the church.<sup>100</sup>

Despite the crushing physical infirmities of his last years,

<sup>97</sup>Proceedings of the Board of Trustees, December 19, 1857.

<sup>98</sup>Thornwell to Preston, South Carolina College, August 4, 1846, in B. M. Palmer, The Life and Times of James Henley Thornwell, D. D., LL. D. (Richmond, 1875), 292-294.

<sup>99</sup>La Borte, History of the South Carolina College, 297; Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men, II, 60.

<sup>100</sup>Columbia South Carolinian, March 30, 1853, April 15, 1857.

Preston escaped disenchantment and weariness of spirit. In the many letters that he wrote to Lieber and to Thompson, he referred frequently to his shattered health, and to his dislike of the "enforced inactivity" which proved especially galling during the final two years of his life. He also alluded often to Penelope's death, which oppressed his spirit as did no other misfortune of his long life. Still, he retained an affirmative attitude toward life, expressing his interest in matters literary and political, and frequently indulging in playful wit. The whole body of correspondence belonging to this period bespeaks a spirit that had worn the honors of life well.

Penelope's death in 1853 left him, as he said, "a wifeless, childless, old man," and he was never able to dispel entirely the shades of sorrow which her loss had thrown across his spirit. Beautiful, mirthful, plucky, intellectual, and infinitely human, she had been an ideal companion for Preston. With engaging grace she had presided over his drawing room in Washington at the peak of his career. A woman of cultivated tastes, she had shared his appreciation of elegance in art and manners. Nimble-witted and sparkling in conversation, she had been able to capture the admiration of men like Clay, Webster, Buchanan, and Van Buren. And when Preston became partially paralyzed in 1852, she "watched over him with a care, affection and devotion which love alone can prompt."<sup>101</sup> In her Diary she once wrote of Preston, "I fear I have been spoiled . . . in my husband. His care,

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<sup>101</sup>Diary of Mrs. Penelope Preston, 5, 9, *passim*; Perry, *Reminiscences of Public Men*, II, 59; Preston to Lieber, Columbia, April 21, 1853, Francis Lieber Papers (Huntington Library).

consideration and companionship make all other individual society insipid and cold."<sup>102</sup>

That Preston was able to keep his grip on life as well as he did after Penelope's death may be accounted for, to some extent at least, by the altruistic endeavors which filled his closing years. In these, which absorbed his mind, he was able to bury his grief. He was thus also to make some return for the honors and distinctions which the people of his adopted state had bestowed upon him.

The most significant project of his closing years--and the one which gave him the most satisfaction--was that of an athenaeum for the city of Columbia. Preston, who had "long had at heart the institution of a Library" for Columbia,<sup>103</sup> began in early 1856 to investigate the possibilities of establishing an institution which would combine the advantages of a circulation library and the learned society. He had earlier seen the failure in Columbia of a society for the advancement of learning, which was designed to serve "the intellectual and learned classes of society."<sup>104</sup> The appeal had been too limited to insure continued support. Besides, as Preston conceived it, the proposed institution should be so designed as to confer the "widest possible benefits," socially, morally, and intellectually.<sup>105</sup> The leading purpose of the projected athenaeum, declared La Borde, was

<sup>102</sup>Diary of Mrs. Penelope Preston, 5.

<sup>103</sup>Columbia South Carolinian, February 13, 1856.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., April 30, 1856.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1856.

to meet the demand of those who are too poor to meet it in the ordinary way; to create a more widespread taste for knowledge, and by its greater diffusion, to secure in larger measure those ennobling and elevating influences which it is so well calculated to produce.<sup>106</sup>

With characteristic earnestness, Preston began the promotion of the enterprise in February. By appeals through the pages of the South Carolinian, by discussions with Columbia's influential citizens, and by letters to those whom he could not call upon personally, he strove to arouse enthusiasm for his cultural project.

He was eminently successful. An organization meeting was held in late February, and the atheneum was officially organized in March. Established upon a permanent basis, the institution was financed by an invested proprietorship fund of \$10,000. The proprietor's fee was \$100.00, and the constitution provided that "any person may become an annual contributor upon the payment of ten dollars per annum." Proprietors, exempt from further contribution, were the sole owners as well as life members. Voting privileges were extended to annual contributors. The institution, called the Columbia Athenaeum, was administered by a twelve-member board of directors, consisting of a president, a vice president, and ten regular officers. Preston was elected first president of the board, and W. B. Stanley, a prominent Columbia merchant, was given the second post. The board membership drew upon "each of the chief associations of civil life": "Dr. M. La Borda, from the College; E. J. Arthur, the Mayor, from the bar; Dr. [R. W.] Gibbs, from the medical profession. . . . The Rev. P. J.

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<sup>106</sup>La Borda, History of the South Carolina College, 298.

Shand represents the clergy." Tradesmen also sat on the board.<sup>107</sup>

In fulfillment of Preston's wishes, the athenaeum was patterned chiefly after the Charleston Mercantile Library Association and the Boston Athenaeum.<sup>108</sup> It was in character a lyceum, combining both library and lecture facilities. In 1859 La Borde gave the following description of the Athenaeum:

There are now besides the library, a reading room and a lecture room; the reading room containing newspapers and periodicals from all the leading sections of the United States, with some also from Europe, and the lecture room being appropriated to the delivery of lectures for the benefit of the public.<sup>109</sup>

Preston donated 1,000 volumes from his vast personal library, and by 1859 the athenaeum's holdings had grown to 2,600 volumes. Before his death in 1860, Preston also donated to the institution the remaining 2,000 volumes of his library.<sup>110</sup> Centrally located, Athenaeum Hall occupied the "whole of the second story of the brick building on the southeast corner of Main and Washington Streets."<sup>111</sup>

Columbia Athenaeum was auspiciously opened on March 17, with an inaugural address by Lieber, who chose as his subject, "The History and Uses of Athenaeums."<sup>112</sup> Other distinguished lecturers followed Lieber during the early years of the institution. Among them were

<sup>107</sup>Columbia South Carolinian, March 20, 27, April 30, 1856.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., February 15, March 1, 1856.

<sup>109</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 298.

<sup>110</sup>Columbia South Carolinian, February 13, 1856, March 4, 1859; O'Neill, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina, 535.

<sup>111</sup>Meriwether, "Literature and the Theatre," loc. cit., 205.

<sup>112</sup>Francis Lieber, A Lecture on the History and Uses of Athenaeums (Columbia, 1856), 31 pp.

both literary men and men of science--men such as Paul Hamilton Hayne, Augustus B. Longstreet, and Joseph Leconte.<sup>113</sup> Preston himself took a personal hand in procuring competent lecturers, to whose performances he listened with "refined enjoyment."<sup>114</sup>

Preston saw his cherished enterprise flourish, but the cultural legacy that he left to the people with whom he had cast his lot survived him by only five years. Used as a "manufactory for Confederate money" during the Civil War, it was consumed in the "general conflagration" which destroyed much of Columbia in 1865.<sup>115</sup>

Preston held the Columbia Athenaeum dear, but it is doubtful that anything gave him deeper satisfaction in his later life than the success of Hiram Powers, the American sculptor. While a member of Congress, Preston had observed the young artist in his workshop, and had admired his skill. Powers confided to Preston his desire to further his training in Florence, explaining that he could not finance the necessary courses of study. Whereupon Preston and his wife launched a subscription for Powers which soon amounted to \$1,500. But when Preston's wealthy brother John learned of the project, he asked Penelope to drop the subscription, since he wished to become Powers' patron. John advanced the necessary funds, and in 1837 Powers sailed

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<sup>113</sup>Columbia South Carolinian, December 4, 1856; Preston to Thompson, Columbia, March 23, 1857, Waddy Thompson Papers.

<sup>114</sup>La Borda, History of the South Carolina College, 298.

<sup>115</sup>Meriwether, "Literature and the Theatre," loc. cit., 206.



for Florence to begin his studies.<sup>116</sup>

Powers' productions captured the critics' eyes, and he soon became one of the most distinguished American statuary sculptors. From his chisel flowed a steady stream of female nudes and marble portrait busts of eminent American men. His "Greek Slave," which "spurred the public to think about and to discuss . . . a piece of sculpture by an American," was the most arresting of his nudes. It was exhibited in Columbia, and Preston, who as a youth had been bewitched by the Roubillac statue at Wrexham, looked upon the marble nude from Powers' hand with deep emotion. In token of his gratitude, Powers executed marble busts of both Preston and his wife, which Preston gave to South Carolina College. In his closing days, Preston made his way daily to the South Carolinians reading room, which became for him a cherished spot. There he read, and paused to look upon the busts of himself and Penelope with boyish pride.<sup>117</sup>

During the final two years of his life, Preston passed his winters at his brother's home in Columbia and his summers with his eldest sister in Charlottesville, Virginia. Pale and torn by physical agonies, he still enjoyed good vision, a clear mind, and an avid interest in polite letters, politics, and oratory. The University of

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<sup>116</sup>Julian A. Selby, Memorabilia and Anecdotal Reminiscences of Columbia (Columbia, 1905), 80-81; Robert Allston to Adele Petigru Allston, Columbia, December 10, 1851, in J. H. Easterby (ed.), The South Carolina Rice Plantation (Chicago, 1946), 112.

<sup>117</sup>The Garnet and Black, I, 63-64; Selby, Memorabilia and Anecdotal Reminiscences of Columbia, 81; Lorado Taft, The History of American Sculpture (New York, 1935), 57-71; La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 298; Henry T. Tuckerman, Book of the Artists (New York, 1867), 278-279.

Virginia library became a favorite haunt, where he spent "six or eight hours reading a day." To Lieber he wrote with childlike exuberance, "The librarian is kind enough to order any book I may have a fancy for, books of good type and paper." Preston became an object of attention on the university campus. With unconcealed admiration and curiosity, the students "crowded about him in numbers whenever an opportunity was offered," just as the boys of Rome had followed upon Cicero's heels in the streets.<sup>118</sup> Too nervous now to indulge in conversation, or to make new acquaintances, Preston returned in thought to the cherished associations of his colorful past. With kindred spirits like Irving and Lieber he communicated by letter. Memories of the past flooded his mind. He was once again peering into Rob Roy's cave with Irving, was in his classroom at the South Carolina College explaining the speculations of Blair, or was pouring forth his bewitching strains of eloquence before a cheering multitude. He paid a visit to Red Hill, Virginia, where he beheld the desk at which his grand-uncle, Patrick Henry, had prepared many of his gripping speeches, and sat with emotion "in the chair in which the great orator had died."<sup>119</sup>

With a failing heart, he returned to Columbia in late 1859. At the request of the wife of a former student, Mrs. James Rion, whose

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<sup>118</sup>Preston to Lieber, Charlottesville, December 19, 1858, Francis Lieber Papers (South Caroliniana Library); Miller, "William C. Preston," *loc. cit.*, XII (January, 1900), 41.

<sup>119</sup>Preston to Irving, Charlottesville, May 11, 1859, William C. Preston Papers (South Caroliniana Library); Irving to Preston, Sunnyside, New York, August 9, 1859, MS, in possession of Mrs. W. C. Hopkins, Richmond, Virginia; Preston to Lieber, Charlottesville, December 19, 1858, Francis Lieber Papers (South Caroliniana Library).

son, Preston Rion, was named for him, Preston set to work on his Reminiscences. Daily he wrote until his strength gave out; then he strolled "among the groves" of the South Carolina College campus, "a majestic ruin," dredging up the beauties and emotions of his past. Still, he kept his eye on the present, and his deepest concern became the thunderheads of civil strife which he had described in his 1836 "Speech on Abolition Petitions." He pictured in his mind again the "horrors of civil conflict" as they had been depicted by Legare in 1828: "brother struggling with brother, parent with child," and the face of the land "streaming with blood." Under the agitation of his deep dreads, he sat down one day in the Athenaeum reading room and poured out his mind to the editor of the Washington National Intelligencer. "There are few voices to endeavor to quell the storm," he declared. Then he added, with poignant sauciness, "My own is quenched by my infirmities, or it should be tried."<sup>120</sup>

His feeble heart soon gave out. Realizing his end was near, he drew up his will on April 27, 1860. To his nieces, Virginia P. and Nanny L. Carrington, he left Preston Place, his only possession of note. Near the end of May his physician confined him to his bed. On the afternoon of May 22, Petigru paid him a visit, and they discussed for several minutes the growing national crisis. Gazing upon Preston's haggard face, Petigru said, "I envy you, Preston. You are leaving us and I will have to stay and see it all." Both men wept. Preston sank

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<sup>120</sup>La Borda, History of the South Carolina College, 297; Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., XII (January, 1900), 41; Washington National Intelligencer, May 28, 1860.

back, his eyes flooded, and gasped. William C. Preston's life was over.<sup>121</sup>

Preston's funeral services, held at the Trinity Episcopal Church, were described by the Carolinian as "profoundly impressive." The seats and aisles of the capacious sanctuary were filled with faculty and students of the College, the board of trustees, members of the bar, "the citizens of Columbia," and "family and connections." Preston was interred in the Churchyard, next to Penelope's tomb, and only paces away from the tombs of such kindred spirits as Maxcy, La Borde, and Henry Timrod. When the hollow beat of the carriage horses' hoofs had died away, silence settled upon the marble of the man who "used to talk like a mocking-bird."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>Will Book "L," 494, Office of the Judge of Probate of Richland County, South Carolina, Columbia; Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 142; Columbia South Carolinian, May 23, 1860.

<sup>122</sup>Columbia Tri-Weekly Southern Guardian, May 26, 1860; Yorkville Enquirer, May 31, 1860; Columbia South Carolinian, May 25, 1860.

## CHAPTER XIII

### PRESTON THE RHETORICIAN: AN APPRAISAL

Oratory was the absorbing activity of Preston's life. He was recognised by his age as a man of varied abilities, and he achieved eminence in several departments of endeavor--in law, in statecraft, and in education. But public speaking was the leading object of his ambition, the activity which fired his imagination and commanded his interest and energy. In his boyhood he was infected with a love for public speaking, and throughout his life he devoted himself to the art with a zealous passion. He sought to achieve finish as a practitioner of the art of speaking. He speculated on its nature. He strove to teach others the fruits of his knowledge about it. As he himself pointed out in his Reminiscences, his claims to distinction rest upon oratorical rather than upon literary abilities.<sup>1</sup> To Lieber he confessed in his forty-second year, "I never write anything. All my life I have been speaking."<sup>2</sup>

Preston's dedication to the speaking art is no Asian mystery. Like the age that produced him, he regarded eloquence as man's highest achievement. The orator and his art he apotheosized, regarding true eloquence as the product of the combination of man's highest faculties.

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<sup>1</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 6.

<sup>2</sup>Preston to Lieber, Washington, D. C., July 16, 1837, Francis Lieber Papers (Huntington Library).

In his "Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare," he suggests his attitude toward eloquence. "Power and honor," he declared, "and all that can attract ardent and aspiring natures, attend it [eloquence]. The noblest instinct is to propagate the spirit, 'to make our mind the mind of other men,' and wield the sceptre in the realm of passion."<sup>3</sup> Preston's statement mirrors accurately the spirit of his times; it is fairly typical of the journalistic commentary on eloquence during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Preston's age accorded him an enviable eminence as an orator. Though some critics did not assign to him genuine stature as a speaker, by far the largest percentage agreed that he was one of the most accomplished orators of his times. La Borde, one-time professor of logic and rhetoric at South Carolina College, considered him as "justly entitled to a place in the first rank of speakers, rhetoricians, declaimers or orators--call it by what term we may--of his times. I care not which may be selected."<sup>5</sup> Edward Everett considered Preston "the most finished orator the country has produced," and George McDuffie is reported to have spoken of Preston as "the finest orator he had ever heard."<sup>6</sup> Many of his contemporaries thought him one of the finest

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<sup>3</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 6.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, "Modern Oratory," The North American Review, VII (July, 1818), 213; "Eloquence," American Quarterly Review, XXI (June, 1837), 288; "Orators and Demagogues," American Literary Magazine, I (August, 1847), 107; "Ancient and Modern Eloquence," Littell's Living Age, XXIX (May 3, 1851), 193; "Ancient and Modern Eloquence," Southern Literary Messenger, VIII (March, 1842), 169.

<sup>5</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 289.

<sup>6</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., XI (December, 1899),



orators of the Senate. One writer noted, "As an orator . . . [he] ranks very highly. Some have even preferred him to Clay."<sup>7</sup> In similar vein, Harvey wrote, "Mr. Preston was said to be, in some respects, the most eloquent man in the United States Senate."<sup>8</sup> George S. Bryan testified, "In the great senatorial struggles with Webster and Clay, and Forsyth and Calhoun, and Benton and Southard, and Frelinghuysen and Leigh, and Rives and Crittenden, I saw him stand a peer."<sup>9</sup>

Preston was also one of the most celebrated popular orators of his times. Contemporary estimates of his speaking are replete with praise of his ability to sway the popular assembly. Typical is La Borde's comment, "As a popular speaker, he was unequalled, unless it be by McBuffie. Nor was it the ignorant multitude alone who were led captive at his will. All alike felt the magic of his eloquence."<sup>10</sup> Similarly, another wrote, "He towered above the argument and the audience in those splendid harangues that stirred up your blood until you were ready, like the Athenians of old, to take up arms and march against the Macedonians. Oh, how great, how noble, how sublime, were the orations of Preston."<sup>11</sup> Finally, Graham believed that as a popular

<sup>7</sup>Anonymous, Sketches of United States' Senators of the Session 1837-'38, 35.

<sup>8</sup>Peter Harvey, Reminiscences and Anecdotes of Daniel Webster (Boston, 1878), 236.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., XII (January, 1900), 39.

<sup>10</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 290.

<sup>11</sup>Mobile Tribune, quoted in Charleston Courier, May 24, 1860.

orator Preston "was without a superior in his section."<sup>12</sup>

The dominant note of the mass of commentary on Preston's oratory is encomiastic, and the judgment of his contemporaries has its place in an evaluation of his rhetorical practice. To formulate an appraisal of Preston the rhetorician,<sup>13</sup> however, it is necessary to examine his ideas on the nature of oratory and the uniqueness and efficacy of his rhetorical practices. In connection with his practice, it is essential to inquire into his preparation, both general and specific, his tenets and logical methods, his compositional practices, his psychological methods, and his delivery. The central concern of such an evaluation is taken to be the speaker's effectiveness: his use of correct rhetorical method.<sup>14</sup>

Preston did not leave a fully developed and systematized formulation of rhetorical theory. Rather, he committed to print certain of his views on the nature of oratory. These speculations are found chiefly in his Reminiscences and in his eulogy on Legare, though some of his letters also contain observations which shed light

<sup>12</sup>Graham, "The History of Southern Oratory During the Federal Period," loc. cit., 50.

<sup>13</sup>The term rhetorician is used here in its broadest sense to refer to "the formulator and philosopher of rhetorical theory; . . . the teacher of the technique of discourse; . . . the speaker with rhetorical intention; and . . . the student or scholar whose concern is the literary or social or behavioral study of rhetoric." See Donald C. Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Functions and Its Scope," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXIX (December, 1953), 408.

<sup>14</sup>For discussions of this view of rhetorical criticism, see especially, Wayland Maxfield Parrish and Marie Hochmuth, American Speeches (New York, 1954), 12; James H. McBurney and Ernest J. Wraga, The Art of Good Speech (New York, 1953), 28-31.

on his concept of the nature of oratory.

One of the familiar themes of the oratorical critics of Preston's America was the "close relationship between eloquence and political and religious liberty."<sup>15</sup> Preston believed with his age that the sub-soil of eloquence was liberty. He declared, "Liberty and eloquence are united in all ages. Where the sovereign power is found in the public mind and the public heart, eloquence is the obvious approach to it."<sup>16</sup>

Preston also conceived of the art of his special love as an instrument, not for achieving personal power, but for serving human kind. Oratory he regarded as indissolubly wedded to ethics; the orator's mission he believed was to assist in the civilizing of man. Oratory was thus a great liberalizing force. Preston concurred with Fenelon that

eloquence was not to be reckoned a frivolous art, that a declaimer uses to impose upon the weak imagination of the multitude, and to serve his own ends, but is a very serious art, designed to instruct people, to regulate their passions, and reform their manners--to direct public councils, and to make men good and happy.<sup>17</sup>

Preston was broad awake to the dangers of conceiving rhetoric as a technique for serving self-interest. Commenting on the oratorical efforts of one of his young friends, he observed, "Even in the pulpit, I have seen men seduced from the appropriate purpose of their high

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<sup>15</sup>Baskerville, "Principal Themes of Nineteenth-Century Critics of Oratory," *loc. cit.*, 13.

<sup>16</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 6.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 30. Cf. Wilbur Samuel Howell (trans.), Fenelon's Dialogues on Eloquence (Princeton, 1951), 73-77.

mission by the fascinating attractions of successful oratory, forgetting the end in the means. It was true of Boussuet;<sup>18</sup> it was true of Whitfield; and I have seen it true at a camp-meeting."<sup>19</sup> Rhetoric was thus, in Preston's view, the handmaid not only of politics, but also of ethics. He believed, therefore, that man's noblest endeavor was the study and practice of rhetoric.

Preston properly conceived of the rhetorical art as being rooted in the science of human behavior. The orator's business was the "enforcing of moral truth," and persuasive efficacy could result only from the orator's awareness of how man knows. Not by intellect alone did man perceive truth, but by every facet of his complex nature. Preston reasoned:

If man, and especially masses of men, were purely intellectual, then cold reason would alone be influential to convince--but our nature is most complex, and many of the great truths which it most concerns us to know, are taught us by our instincts, our sentiments, our impulses and our passions. Even in regard to the highest and holiest of all truth, to know which concerns us here and hereafter, we are not permitted to approach its investigation in the confidence of proud and erring reason, but are taught to become as little children, before we are worthy to receive it.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Preston was impatient of the notion that "the enforcing of truth" is most successfully effected by a cold and formal logic. Man caught hold of moral truth not by intellect alone. More than this, the art of dialectic could not be trusted to yield always the harvest

<sup>18</sup>Seventeenth-century French divine, orator, and author.

<sup>19</sup>Quoted in Miller, "William C. Preston," *loc. cit.*, XI (December, 1899), 594.

<sup>20</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 28.

of truth. Echoing Aristotle, he contended:

It is commonly, but mistakenly, supposed that the enforcing of truth is most successfully effected by a cold and formal logic; but the subtleties of dialectics and the forms of logic, may play as fantastic tricks with truth as the most potent magic of fancy. The attempt to apply mathematical precision to moral truth, is always a failure, and generally a dangerous one.<sup>21</sup>

Preston believed, therefore, like Maxcy, his undergraduate mentor, that the orator should "appeal to man as he is," not as he is romantically or ideally conceived to be. And the real test of the orator was the degree to which he could play upon all the strings of man's nature. "It is to . . . [man's] complex nature that the speaker addresses himself, and the degree of power with which all the elements are evoked, is the criterion of the orator."<sup>22</sup>

Following the trail of Cicero, Preston classified the ends of speaking as: to convince, to persuade, and to inspire. He made clear, too, that he considered the end of inspiration as the orator's leading mission. "His business, to be sure, is to convince, but more to persuade, and most of all, to inspire with noble and generous passions."<sup>23</sup>

In his speculations on the nature of oratory, Preston also came to grips with the familiar question of the relationship of logic to rhetoric. Figuratively minded as he was, he employed an analogy in which there were overtones of Campbell.<sup>24</sup> His illustration was one

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Campbell's statement: "If then it is the business of logic to evince the truth; to convince an auditory, which is the



of the most felicitous expressions of all his printed utterances.

It is the cant of criticism, in all ages, to make a distinction between logic and eloquence, and to stigmatize the latter as declamation. Logic ascertains the weight of an argument; Eloquence gives it momentum. The difference is that between the vis inertiae of a mass of metal, and the same ball hurled from the cannon's mouth. Eloquence is an argument alive and in motion--the statue of Pygmalion, inspired with vitality.<sup>25</sup>

Preston also made clear that the quintessence of eloquence consisted in verbal imagery and motive appeal, for he illustrated his idea further with the following concrete example.

When, in 1828, Mr. Legare depicted the possible consequences of a collision of the State with the Federal government, in a few glowing sentences--brother struggling with brother, parent with child, and the face of the land wrapt in conflagration and streaming with blood--while the slave, amidst the awful confusion, clanking his manacles, leaps up to join the dreadful revelry--was there less power in the argument to arrest the progress of Nullification, than if it had been presented with cold continuity and precision?<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the essential stuff of eloquence was sensory language and emotional proof. And Preston, like Legare, concurred with Hume that

province of eloquence, is but a particular application of the logicians' art. As logic therefore forges the arms which eloquence teacheth us to wield, we must first have recourse to the former, that being made acquainted with the materials of which her weapons and armour are severally made, we may know their respective strength and temper, and when and how each is to be used." George Campbell, The Philosophy of Rhetoric, New Ed. (Boston, 1818), 46.

<sup>25</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 28. Preston's statement on eloquence in the eulogy on Legare, ending with this analogy, was included as a prose selection for oral reading in Sterling's Southern Fifth Reader, a textbook designed "for the use of the higher classes in Schools and Academies," and used widely in the South following the Civil War. See Richard Sterling, Southern Fifth Reader (New York, 1866), 399-400.

<sup>26</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 28.



the "sublime and passionate [style of oratory]" is of a much juster taste than the modern, or the argumentative and rational; and, if properly executed, will always have more command and authority over mankind."<sup>27</sup>

Preston also speculated on the nature of extemporaneous delivery. His ideas, seemingly original with him, were prompted by his observations of the performances of the Italian improvisatores. Extemporaneous utterance, he believed, implied "no very peculiar intellectual endowments." Its foundation, however, was physiological. "Perhaps the only natural qualification for it, is a capacity of utterance depending upon the organization of the vocal organs, their sensitiveness, their susceptibility to the impressions of thought, so that they respond promptly to the mental impressions." The mental conception, he concluded, was "almost instantaneous"; so rapid was thought that its "inception and progress" were virtually inconceivable. Preston's speculations led him into the unfathomed depths of mental perception. In the case of both the extemporaneous speaker and the improvisatore, he concluded:

thought always runs ahead of utterance and selects but does not create the materials. In both cases, I am inclined to believe, is the faculty of an excited and rapid emotion, which from the whole mass of former impressions recollects what is proper for the occasion in hand, and instantly combines them into suitable arrangement. The materials must previously have existed in the mind,--they may have been slightly organized, or nearly obliterated,--but warmed by the excitement of extemporary speaking they spring out like sympathetic

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 29.

licks before the fire and the memory reads them.<sup>28</sup>

Preston also sought to account for rhythmical extemporaneous utterance, writing:

Now in the construction of all languages and perhaps in all human thought, there is a cadence and rhythm, which a nice ear and flexible voice, naturally catches; and words to express this melody rise up and present themselves, or are recalled and pressed into service, by a rapid memory.<sup>29</sup>

Hearers, he had noted, commonly fell under the enchantment of rhythmical utterance. Thus it was that

the speaker, when he has caught the sympathies of his auditors, is apt to have beauties attributed to him which a cooler judgment would not perceive. And it not infrequently happens that a speech perfectly reported in its sapiens verbis is declared to be different from what one had heard delivered.<sup>30</sup>

Preston's views on oratorical style may be synthesized from his scattered critical commentary and from his remarks on the subject of style in the eulogy on Legare. In Preston's ideas on oratorical style there are echoes of both neo-classicism and romanticism. Taste was his critical touchstone; in this he showed the romantic strain. "In the art of speaking, as in all other arts," he contended, "a just combination of those qualities necessary to the end proposed, is the true rule of taste." With penetration, he observed, "The one may impede the progress of the argument, or divert attention from it, by

<sup>28</sup>Farborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 83.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 84.

the introduction of extraneous matter--the other may exhaust attention or weary by monotony." As between the two extremes, Preston thought it best to lean on the side of excess, for he said, "The safer side to err on, is that of abundance--as profusion is better than poverty; as it is better to be detained by the beauties of a landscape, than by the weariness of the desert."<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, Preston thus implies an awareness of the importance of commanding the listener's attention.

But good taste was Preston's desideratum of oratorical style. "Elegance is in a just medium,"<sup>32</sup> he urged, and by this precept he judged speech composition. Thus, Demosthenes' style was too severe and unadorned for Preston's palate. He is reported to have said of Calhoun's "Speech on the Mexican War"--a speech of marked severity of style--"It is antique, and an imitation of Demosthenes."<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, the weakness of Legare's style was a tendency to "amplitude" and "declamation."<sup>34</sup> By the same token, Preston condemned what he called "the falsetto style of Irish eloquence," practiced by Grattan and Curran. It was too studied, too rococo, "a sort of bombastic display." Preston concluded, "High artists have imitated the Greek but the arabesque imitators are ludicrous."<sup>35</sup> Thus, also, Preston

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<sup>31</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 27.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>D. J. McCord to John C. Calhoun, Langsyne, S. C., January 23, 1848, in Boucher (ed.), "Correspondence Addressed to John C. Calhoun," loc. cit., 426.

<sup>34</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 27.

<sup>35</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 30-31.

condemned the style of James Ogilvie, the magniloquent American orator and rhetoric teacher. He pronounced Ogilvie's rhetoric "flamboyant," characterizing the Scottish orator as "that wonderful example of the solemn comical."<sup>36</sup>

Fortunately, Preston specified what he regarded as his ideal of stylistic excellence. Of Clay's "Speech on the Mexican War," delivered on November 13, 1847, at Lexington, Kentucky, Preston declared, "It is a marvellous example of stylistic beauty and power."<sup>37</sup> Significantly, Clay announced in his exordium:

I have come here with no purpose to attempt to make a speech, or any ambitious oratorical display. I have brought with me no rhetorical bouquets to throw into this assemblage. In the circle of the year autumn has come, and the season of flowers has passed away. In the progress of years, my spring time has gone by, and I too am in the autumn of life, and feel the frost of age.<sup>38</sup>

This passage is fairly typical of the style of the speech, which is characterized by sincerity, ease, and verve. In his use of language, Clay was sensory, but not florid. His alliterative phrases were unobtrusive. His sentences were varied both as to type and length, and he made heavy use of the rhetorical question. Finally, it is interesting to note that Clay used a formal, external summary to conclude his address.

In reply to Preston's comment on his speech, Clay wrote:

<sup>36</sup>Preston to Irving, Columbia, 1852, quoted in Richard Beale Davis, "James Ogilvie, An Early American Teacher of Rhetoric," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXVIII (October, 1942), 297.

<sup>37</sup>Preston to Clay, Columbia, November 28, 1847, Henry Clay Papers.

<sup>38</sup>Niles' National Register, LXXIII (November 27, 1847), 197-200.

Among the many commendations which I have received of the speech which I felt it to be my duty to make at Lexington on the 13th ult., none has afforded me so much gratification as that contained in your letter of the 28th ult. because I believe there is no more competent judge in our country than you of such a production.<sup>39</sup>

Preston also believed that the orator's techniques of composition and delivery should be unobtrusive. The hearer should not be permitted to discover the speaker's technique, since the "perfection of art" was "to conceal itself." In this connection, he believed the orator should not follow slavishly the so-called "rules" of rhetoric. In doing so, he would incur the risk of revealing his technique. Still worse, he would stifle his creativity. Thus, he said of Legare, "There were occasions on which he exhibited obedience to rules, when, perhaps, he might have snatched a grace beyond the reach of art."<sup>40</sup>

Preston's oratorical precepts reveal his lively interest in the rhetorical art; they also bespeak a lifetime of attention to the technique and methodology of rhetoric. His preparation for the platform, begun in early boyhood, was calculated to yield persuasive efficacy. He was endowed by nature with a fertile imagination, a mercurial disposition, a commanding mien, and fluency of speech. To what degree his native equipment was hereditary is, of course, purely conjectural. His genealogy included Erskine and Brougham, and in his veins flowed the blood of Henry. Not a few of Preston's contemporaries thought him intrinsically eloquent. Grayson, who witnessed the "battle

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<sup>39</sup>Clay to Preston, Ashland, Kentucky, December 13, 1847, Papers of the Campbell-Preston Families, Library of Congress.

<sup>40</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 30.

of the Gods" on Jackson's removal of the federal deposits, wrote, "W. C. Preston, I thought, had most of the genuine spirit of the orator--the gift which Nature imparts and which no art or labour can produce--the power possessed by Chatham and Patrick Henry."<sup>41</sup> A Charleston chancellor also declared of him, "He was by far the most gifted natural orator to whose eloquence I have ever listened. . . ."<sup>42</sup>

Preston's development as a speaker was stimulated and moulded by a wealth of speech experiences, formal and informal. His practice of oral reading under Whaley; his debating experiences in the Graham and Euphradian literary societies; his study of rhetoric under Jonathan Maxcy; his acquaintance with Longinus and Cicero, Blair and Kamas, were all experiences which undergirded his oratorical practice. Besides, his extensive speech training included his observation of the oratory of the "War Hawks," the florid forensic oratory of the pleaders of the Irish Four Courts, the emotive performances of the Italian improvisadores, the fiery sermons of Chalmers, the Scottish divine, and the majestic primitive utterances of the American Indian chiefs. To these were added the refining experiences of a long and varied professional career, sustained by a passionate love for the spoken word.

Preston was aware that the orator did not succeed by technique alone, but also by worthwhile matter; that the messages of the genuine orator are burgeonings of a cultivated, well-informed mind. In his oratorical practice, Preston drew upon a broad general knowledge. His

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<sup>41</sup>Stoney (ed.), "The Autobiography of William John Grayson," loc. cit., 135.

<sup>42</sup>Charleston Courier, May 24, 1860.



acquaintance with books was extensive, and from his youth he read omnivorously. Libraries held a strong attraction for him; wherever he was, he sought them out. His father's library, the reading rooms of Dublin and of Runcorn, the Bibliothéque du Roy, the Caroliniana and the Athenaeum reading rooms, and his own vast library, afforded resources which he tapped.

The substance of Preston's public address was garnered from an abundant storehouse of knowledge. His learning was marked rather by breadth than by depth. La Borde noted that his "acquaintance with books is general, but his principal acquisitions are in what is comprehended under Polite Literature. With the classic authors of England and France particularly, he has great familiarity. With the great poets, writers of fiction, dramatists and essayists, he has kept company from early life, and few among us have profited as much from it."<sup>43</sup> Another wrote of Preston as being "fairly saturated with the classics."<sup>44</sup> Although polite literature was his favorite field, Preston foraged over many other fields of knowledge. He read ancient and modern history, political science, law, philosophy, economics, and theology. His weakest areas were pure science and economics, though he was not unfamiliar with those fields. His predilection for the esthetic side of learning attracted him to the fine arts, and he developed an ardent interest in sculpture. His public addresses reveal him clearly as "a man of extent and variety of intellectual

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<sup>43</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 292-293.

<sup>44</sup>John P. Thomas, quoted in Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., XI (November, 1899), 530.

culture."<sup>45</sup>

Preston's general preparation for the platform was enriched by his travels. A close observer of human life, of nature, and of art, he garnered up impressions on the American frontier, in the art galleries and theatres of Paris, in the Scottish highlands, and the storied cities of Italy. He mingled with every stratum of society: Virginia gentlemen, the literati of Edinburgh, frontiersmen, redskins, and South Carolina yeomen. From impressions gained in all walks of life were formed judgments, figures, and analogies which found expression in, and gave effectiveness to, his public utterances.

Another important feature of Preston's general preparation for speaking was his close attention to the verbal element of utterance. He equipped himself well with words of precision and suggestiveness, as an examination of his letters and speeches shows. One contemporary noted, "He has wonderful command of language, and speaks with greatest facility. Never have I seen his superior in this respect. His words come without effort, and the surprise is, that such words, such propriety of expression, should fall from his lips seemingly uncalled for and unbidden." Preston's study of foreign languages, particularly the modern, was doubtless a significant factor in extending the range of his vocabulary. Though he knew little Latin and less Greek, he was "well skilled" in French. He also possessed some familiarity with

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<sup>45</sup>Anonymous, Sketches of United States' Senators of the Session of 1837-'38, 33.

both German and Italian.<sup>46</sup> His study of the classics was, doubtless, an important instrument in his language acquisitions.

Preston's general preparation was not less calculated to insure rhetorical effectiveness than his immediate preparation, which was, in most instances, intensive. Preston "believed in the gospel of work and practiced what he preached." Success in speaking did not derive from native brilliance alone, but by "great effort"--by "wrestling all night."<sup>47</sup> Preston is reported to have said that "he had never spoken without days and nights spent in laborious preparation." His brother testified that he prepared his speeches "with elaborate care,"<sup>48</sup> and another writer declared of him, "He never spoke in Congress without the most ample and careful preparation. . . ."<sup>49</sup> All of Preston's major printed addresses, both ceremonial and notivative, indicate considerable research and reflection, as well as compositional refinement. Many of his brief efforts in running senate debate, however, show scant preparation, though he never took the floor unless he desired to seek additional information on the matter under debate, or could contribute fresh information or argument. Some of his major senatorial efforts indicate that he knew thoroughly the background of the question. These speeches were rich depositories of fact

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<sup>46</sup>La Bords, History of the South Carolina College, 293; Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 36; Preston to Lieber, Washington, May 15, 1839, Francis Lieber Papers (Buntington Library).

<sup>47</sup>Preston, Address to the Students of South Carolina College, 11; Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., XII (January, 1900), 46.

<sup>48</sup>Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 143.

<sup>49</sup>Wilson, Washington, The Capitol City, I, 294.

and argument which helped to illuminate the question under debate. Webster acknowledged his indebtedness to Preston for the "instruction" he had derived from his "efforts in debate."<sup>50</sup>

The content of Preston's senatorial addresses was drawn from wide sources. His speeches on French spoliation claims, on the Sub-Treasury, on the annexation of Texas, and on abolition petitions indicate that he conned government documents and reports, state papers and letters, maps, histories, and periodical articles. Such sources were tapped for factual data chiefly. Conversation and letters were yet other leading resources for the materials of Preston's motivative speeches. He was himself a brilliant conversationalist, and employed conversation frequently as a proving ground for his ideas.<sup>51</sup> Through correspondence Preston also sifted and tested his knowledge and derived information. The great deficiency of his general preparation was in the realm of banking and finance. He appears to have been thoroughly competent in handling the legal questions involved in constitutional issues, but questions of government finance gave him trouble. Time after time, during the latter half of his senatorial career, he sought the expert economic counsel of John Davis of Massachusetts. There is also evidence that he derived aid from Henry

<sup>50</sup>Quoted in Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 140-141.

<sup>51</sup>Charleston Mercury, May 24, 1860; Poore, Perley Poore's Reminiscences, I, 177-178; La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 293. La Borde wrote of Preston: "In conversational power I have never met his equal." He also reported that he had been "asked frequently" by his friends "to accompany them on a call upon him, for no other reason than that they wished to avail themselves of the charms of his conversation."

L. Pinckney on the question of the Sub-Treasury.<sup>52</sup> Among the many correspondents from whom he secured speech materials on various topics were Lieber, Irving, Mangum, Berrien, Thompson, Petigru, Calhoun, and possibly Legare.

Preston's high level of general education, and his careful immediate preparation, gave maturity to his utterances and contributed to his effectiveness as a speaker. Since rhetoric "is primarily concerned with the relations of ideas to the thoughts, feelings, motives and behavior of men,"<sup>53</sup> it is essential to inquire into the substance of Preston's public address and to appraise the effectiveness of his logical methods. With what causes, principles, ideas, and ideals was he identified as a rhetorician? With what measure of efficacy did he reinforce his premises and sustain his positions through the method of argument? Since the great body of Preston's address was motivative in character, it is his career as a legislator, particularly, that invites inquiry into the fundamental beliefs which underlay his reasoning on political issues.

Preston's deliberative addresses show that he conceived of civil liberty as being the essential ingredient of human happiness. Government was the great shield of individual liberties. The

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<sup>52</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, November 8, 1837. This issue contains an essay on the Sub-Treasury written by Pinckney which bears a close resemblance to Preston's "Speech on the Sub-Treasury," both in idea and in composition. It was evidently written before the delivery of Preston's address, but was not published until after the delivery.

<sup>53</sup>Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Functions and Scope," loc. cit., 412-413. See, also, Hoyt H. Hudson, "The Field of Rhetoric," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XI (April, 1923), 180.

Constitution, expressing the wisdom of patriarch statesmen, was the instrument by which the integrity of individual liberties was to be preserved. Freedom of religion, freedom of the press, habeas corpus, and trial by jury were precious freedoms of the Constitution.

Preston professed adherence to the State Rights Republican school of thought: its political principles constituted the base line of his reasoning as a deliberative speaker. In his "Speech on the Interference of Federal Officers in Elections," he claimed:

I, for one, was born under the influence of these Republican principles, had them infused into me during the whole of my youth, and have cherished them ever since as the breath of life. . . . I have rejected Federalist doctrine . . . from my earliest days, and have adopted the Virginia resolutions of 1798.<sup>54</sup>

Preston's political bible was constituted thus in the Bill of Rights and the Virginia Resolutions; he termed the latter "our second bill of rights," for by it equal rights were "secured to all." Preston therefore held that "This government is . . . a confederacy of sovereign States, associating themselves together for mutual advantages." The government of the United States was not a "consolidated Government of one people"; rather, it was "a confederated Government of many States." Like Calhoun, Preston believed that in the population of each state resided indivisible sovereignty. The elected delegates of each state were merely the functionaries of the government. These

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<sup>54</sup>Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 341.



public officers, he asserted, "have no source of power but the Constitution, which prescribes, defines, and limits their action, and constitutes them, in their aggregate capacity, a trust or agency, for the performance of certain duties confided to them by various States or communities."<sup>55</sup>

A careful maintenance of the rights and powers of the states, Preston reasoned, offered the best means of achieving the supremacy of individual liberty. The Constitution was a compact among the sovereign states, qualified by the right of declaring a federal act null and void when it violated individual liberties. Man's experience in governing himself had revealed that the great predators of individual liberty were the executive and legislative functionaries. Government "in its very nature" was "the concentration of power from the many in the hands of the few, which is ever more or less liable to be turned by them against the public liberty." The danger of executive usurpation lay in two factors intrinsic to a republican government of "distinct and different departments." One danger, enunciated by De Tocqueville, was that since the people "feel that the President is an emanation from themselves, they are liable to argue that when he augments his own power, it is for the people." Thus, "every executive may go on in the acquisition of the proper power of the Legislature and the Judiciary." Another intrinsic danger of executive usurpation was that by its very nature the executive of the United States was a

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<sup>55</sup>"Speech on the Annexation of Texas," *ibid.*, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 557.

fountain of patronage. He presided over "the entire system of jobs and contracts," by which he could augment and extend his power.<sup>56</sup>

Equally as dangerous to liberty was congressional usurpation, by which the powers belonging to the executive might be usurped, and the interests of sections trampled upon.<sup>57</sup> The only insurance against this evil was the president's veto power. Preston seems to have held no fear whatsoever of a "judicial despotism," as did many of his colleagues.

The tenets of Preston's political faith, then, were: (1) the supremacy of individual liberty; (2) a careful maintenance of the rights and powers of the states; (3) strict construction of the constitution; and (4) inhibition of federal consolidation. Such was the political credo of the "true" State Rights Republicans of the South. They were planters, by and large, and their guiding principle was individual and state rights.<sup>58</sup> Behind this essentially conservative credo was the thinking of Jefferson and Madison, Burke and Tocqueville, and Calhoun.

Preston conceived of the role of the orator-statesman as being that of an enlightened sentinel of liberty. In one speech he asked:

Sir, what is the price of our liberty and of our free Government, and how are we to sustain them? It is by eternal vigilance alone that public liberty can be

<sup>56</sup>"Speech on the Bill to Prevent the Interference of Federal Officers in Elections, Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 342.

<sup>57</sup>"Speech on the Veto Power," ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Raymond G. Gettell, History of American Political Thought (New York, 1928), 197-204.

maintained; and it is by this very jealousy . . . alone, unslumbering and undying, that our form of Government can be preserved. It is passed into a proverb, that only by jealousy and watchfulness can a free Government be long maintained.<sup>59</sup>

The influence of the American experience during the Revolution, dramatized in the life of his orator grand-uncle, Henry, lay heavily upon Preston's thinking. When he exclaimed in his speech at the National Convention of Whig Young Men in 1840, "I was born a Whig, and am yet a Whig,"<sup>60</sup> he was associating Whiggism not with the principle that the federal government stands "in loco parentis to the rising commonwealths,"<sup>61</sup> but with its revolutionary meaning of opposition to oppression. To Preston, Whiggism symbolized devotion to liberty, and hatred of tyranny. To Clay, however, it meant "benevolent paternalism" of the federal government.<sup>62</sup>

By his political credo and his concept of his function as a legislator, Preston charted his political course, which was consistent to a fault. He was correct when he wrote in 1841, "I have deserted from or to no party, but have maintained a straight forward and direct course, from the beginning of my career to the present moment."<sup>63</sup> From 1828 to 1833, his was the leading voice in the South Carolina legislature for free trade and state interposition. His ardent

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<sup>59</sup>"Speech on the Interference of Federal Officers in Elections," Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 341.

<sup>60</sup>Niles' National Register, LVIII (May 9, 1840), 159.

<sup>61</sup>Farrington, The Romantic Revolution in America, 1800-1860, 141-142.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 142.

<sup>63</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, May 12, 1841.

opposition to the protective principle, as he himself declared, gained him "the honor of an election to the Senate."<sup>64</sup> From 1834 to 1837 he battled under the banner of the Whig coalition, becoming perhaps the most courageous and vehement opponent of the men and measures of the Jackson administration. The positions he took on the issues of senatorial debate, as well as his lines of reasoning, were in perfect harmony with his political credo and his dedication to the cause of beating down the "power and patronage party." In 1837, when Calhoun joined the Van Buren party on the Sub-Treasury issue, Preston refused to desert his cause and his principles, believing the Sub-Treasury a scheme for extending executive power, and mistrusting the authors of the "bloody bill," the tariff, and the expunging resolution. From 1837 to 1842, when he resigned his Senate seat, he continued to oppose the spoils party, articulating his contentions with his political tenets. Thus, he advocated the annexation of Texas, and the bill to prevent the interference of federal officers in elections; he opposed the cession of public lands to the states in which they lay, Clay's tariff measure, the prohibition of the issue of small bank notes by the states, and the bill to establish additional branch mints. Even on the national bank issue, Preston must be credited with consistency. He opposed both the Sub-Treasury and the National Bank, believing a state bank system preferable to either. After the collapse of the Sub-Treasury in 1841, however, a national bank became the only alternative, and Preston supported the measure in the belief that it

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

was the lesser of two evils.<sup>65</sup> Although from 1840 to 1842 Preston sat in the Whig ranks, he did not endorse the Whig measures which could not be reconciled to his political credo.

The positions Preston took and the arguments he advanced in his campaign speeches of 1840 and 1844 were in harmony with the cause for which he had labored as well as his fundamental political beliefs. In 1840 he urged the election of Harrison as the only means of dismantling the vast patronage system of the Jackson-Van Buren party, and of restoring economic prosperity to the nation. The Whig cause to Preston was "the cause of the country, of the Constitution, of liberty."<sup>66</sup> In 1844 he advocated Clay's election, not because he embraced the whole of Clay's political philosophy, but because he (1) liked and respected Clay, (2) thought Clay more qualified than Polk to resolve the great sectional crises that were developing; and (3) feared re-establishment of the "power and patronage party."

To complete the account of Preston's political thinking, it is necessary to note his drift away from the doctrine of nullification. Inspired by an unshakable faith that state interposition offered the only efficacious measure of redress for the economic ills of the South, he became a leading champion of the South Carolina doctrine during the nullification controversy. He and Harper were two of the most articulate expounders of Calhoun's theory as set forth in the

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>"Speech at Elizabethtown, New Jersey," Columbia Southern Chronicle, August 20, 1840.

Exposition. Following the resolution of the nullification crisis, Preston remained a zealous defender of state rights, enunciating his views vigorously as late as 1838 in his "Speech on the Annexation of Texas." Yet his zeal for the doctrine of nullification appears to have abated considerably as the years wore on. There is some evidence that the Webster-Hayne debates of 1830 influenced his thinking. One writer records that when Preston was introduced to Webster in 1833, he said, "I have anticipated with a great deal of pleasure the event of seeing you, and of gazing for the first time upon the man who cured me of that abominable heresy, nullification."<sup>67</sup> An examination of Preston's speeches and letters fails to show that he discarded nullification as "heresy," though there is evidence that he drifted toward the position taken by Webster in his reply to Hayne. In that speech, Webster admitted the right of revolution, but did not concede that under the Constitution there was any method by which a state government, as a member of the union, could estop an action of the federal government "by force of her own laws under any circumstances whatever."<sup>68</sup> Although Preston did not enter the speaking campaign initiated by the Southern movement of 1849-1851, he did exert his influence in favor of acceptance of the Compromise of 1850. During that crisis, as one historian notes, "The cause of Union was ably championed by Benjamin F. Perry . . . and by the most prominent Whig leader in South Carolina, William C. Preston."<sup>69</sup> Shortly before his

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<sup>67</sup>Harvey, Reminiscences and Anecdotes of Daniel Webster, 236-237.

<sup>68</sup>Register of Congressional Debates, 21st Cong., 1st Sess., 78.

<sup>69</sup>Clement Eaton, A History of the Old South (New York, 1949), 548; Columbia Daily Telegraph, September 9, 26, 1850.



death, Preston is reported to have avowed that "he knew of no conceivable circumstances which would induce him to vote for a dissolution of the Union." He advocated revolution, not secession, if an appeal to arms should be made.<sup>70</sup>

In sum, the Constitution was the crucible through which Preston ran the substance of his motivative address. To the Constitution may be traced his jealous concern for individual liberty, his belief in state rights, his defense of slavery, his advocacy of the annexation of Texas, his support of Clay's resolution censuring Jackson, his attack on the expunging resolution, the bill to prevent the interference of federal officers in elections, the bill to remove the veto power of the president, and the reception of abolition petitions. His veneration for the Constitution, which he regarded as a sacrosanct document of wisdom, coupled with his daring spirit, made of him perhaps the most vigilant and outspoken guardian of the Constitution during the years of his senatorial career.

The moral and intellectual ideals to which Preston gave public utterance constitute the substance of his ceremonial address. These ideals, most clearly enunciated in his eulogy on Legare and in his inaugural address as president of South Carolina College, were standards of excellence, noble ends, which figured prominently in his own concept of the good life, and which he wished to bequeath to others. Oratorical excellence was among those objects Preston believed worthy of aspiration. "The noblest instinct," he urged, was "to propagate the spirit; 'to make our mind the mind of other men,' and wield the

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<sup>70</sup> Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., XII (January, 1900),

sceptre in the realm of passion." Significantly, too, in Preston's mind, the chief business of the orator was not to convince, nor yet to persuade, but "to inspire with noble and generous passions." Preston also celebrated "intellectual excellence," the living embodiment of which he considered Legare.<sup>71</sup> Yet another ideal to which Preston gave forceful utterance was moral excellence. Knowledge and virtue were intimately connected, for whatever exalted the mind purified and invigorated "the virtues of the heart." The final ingredient of the ideal life was piety, and in the triad of learning, morality, and religion was comprehended all that is desirable. "They comprehend those lesser morals," Preston declared, "the aggregate of which make a gentleman fitted to adorn and delight society,--they comprehend all those sentiments which become a citizen born to a participation in the government of the commonwealth, and all those deep convictions and aspirations which belong to heirs of eternity."<sup>72</sup>

Preston's oratorical effectiveness derives in large measure from his ability in handling the proofs of persuasion. Following his own directive, he sought to gain credibility in the minds of his listeners not only through logical demonstration, but also through emotional and ethical appeal. In Preston's view, "the criterion of the orator" was the "degree of power" with which he could "evoke all the elements" of his listeners' nature.

Preston's use of rational appeal was influenced by his own

<sup>71</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 5, 26, 28.

<sup>72</sup>Id., Address to the Students of South Carolina College, 6.

nature and his views on epistemology. Mercurial and imaginative, he was not at home in the mazes of ratiocination. His mind was analogical, rather than logical, and his contemporaries frequently noted that rigorous argumentation was not his forte. Magoon observed, for example, "He can defend any favorite system with the flowers of rhetoric much more effectively than with the . . . weapons of syllogistic form."<sup>73</sup> Also, La Borde, declared, "I do not regard Mr. Preston as defective in logical or argumentative power; but I would assign the predominance to the perceptive faculties. His imagination is warm and fervid, and delights to sport in beautiful creations."<sup>74</sup> Preston was broad awake to the shortcomings of dialectic, the logic of probable reasoning, averring that "the subtleties of dialectics and the forms of logic may play as fantastic tricks with truth as the most potent magic of Fancy." He also was alive to the pitfalls involved in attempting to locate moral truth through the avenue of apodeictic logic.<sup>75</sup> Unlike some of his contemporaries, he did not worship at the shrine of reason. Rather, he may be said to have worshipped at the shrine of imagination.

In logical procedure Preston was essentially inductive; at his best he was one of the ablest reasoners in the Senate. The politician, he argued, must solve economic and political problems with reference to the "concrete experiences of the past." He must abstract from

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<sup>73</sup>Magoon, Living Orators in America, 384.

<sup>74</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 292.

<sup>75</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 28.

"concrete existence," taking it for granted "in politics as we do in nature, that what has happened always will happen again."<sup>76</sup> Many of his senatorial addresses show a masterly control of the process of induction. An examination of the whole body of his senatorial utterances also shows clearly a marked development of skill in handling the inductive procedure. His "Speech on the Annexation of Texas"; his "Speech on the Distribution of the Proceeds of the Public Lands," were elaborate inductions. His most effective logical method, combining both constructive and refutatory argument, is illustrated by the latter speech. This technique, of which he became a master, consisted, first, in amassing a compelling structure of testimony and specific instance from which were drawn a set of general principles by which a policy measure might be put to test. His next procedure was to apply these principles to the measure under debate, demonstrating lucidly the tenuousness of the arguments used to support the measure.

Preston's motivative speeches reveal a fondness for argument from authority, and he employed testimony with telling effect, not only in establishing his constructive case, but also in weakening the case of his opponents. Frequently he called upon his own observations, but his speeches show a marked predilection for the authority of venerated statesmen: Jefferson, Madison, Washington, John Adams, Jackson, Webster, and Clay. He unearthed authority from every conceivable source: from the Constitution, congressional resolutions, committee

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<sup>76</sup>Preston to his Richland Constituents, September 3, 1838, Niles' National Register, LV (September 29, 1838), 77.

reports, presidential messages, maps, state correspondence, Treasury Department and census reports, and state deeds of cession. Such sources he used effectively in supporting his contentions; coupled with an occasional cause-to-effect argument, statistics, an historical example, or an analogy, they served as an adequate and valid substructure for his reasoning. Significantly, too, Preston invariably stated the source of his authority, frequently taking the time to comment briefly on its reliability.

The greatest logical triumphs of Preston's senatorial career were his speeches on Texas annexation and the distribution of the proceeds of the sales of public lands. The former effort, a masterpiece of inventive genius, achieved, through induction, the highest measure of probability that annexation was, in reality, reannexation and that such procedure was both practicable and desirable. In the latter effort, Preston rigorously bore down every constructive argument presented by Calhoun in favor of his land bill amendment. It was this discourse, delivered in 1841, which elicited from John Quincy Adams the judgment that Preston was the most accomplished orator in the Senate.

Preston's motivative speeches show neither skill in, nor fondness for, deductive procedure, and his lack of ability in the process of deduction militated to some extent against his rhetorical effectiveness. Many of his senatorial colleagues were his superior in strict logical deduction. On occasion, Preston emasculated his logical effectiveness by drawing deductions which threw him upon slippery ground. Two instances, in particular, are worth noting.

In his "Speech on the Interference of Federal Officers in Elections," Preston reasoned as follows: Since the Wall Committee is pro-administration, it wishes to sustain executive patronage. Therefore, it formulated an unfavorable report on Crittenden's bill to curb interference of federal officers in elections. Propelled by this deduction, Preston dissected meticulously the language of the Wall report, and in an amazing piece of logomachy, attempted to establish the proposition that the Wall report "argued that it is the bounden duty of the Executive officers to interfere in elections, and that any restriction upon them is unconstitutional, proscriptive, and monstrous, deserving the severest possible castigation of the committee."<sup>77</sup> An examination of the Wall report reveals clearly the speciousness of his reasoning. In his overzealous desire to construe the report into a eulogy on executive patronage, he was blinded to the dangers inherent in Crittenden's bill--dangers to civil liberty. Ironically, the sentinel of individual liberty saw a mirage of executive usurpation, and failed to hear the fog-horn of a judicial despotism.

Similarly, Preston's deduced position on the annexation of Texas was vulnerable. Though he did argue cogently that annexation was properly mere re-annexation--that the United States would merely be reclaiming what properly belonged to her--he either could not or would not admit that the United States could no longer assert the slightest claim to the territory west of the Sabine River. In this instance, Preston's intense desire to maintain an equipoise in the

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<sup>77</sup>Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess.,  
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Senate by extending the territory of the slavocracy was doubtless influential in vitiating his argument. In this connection, La Borde's testimony is strikingly apt.

Feeling enters, perhaps, too much into his judgment, and . . . he is not disposed to listen patiently to the lessons of a calm and sober philosophy. He is inclined, therefore, to push his opinions too far; to overlook the proper conditions and qualifications, and in the excess of emotion, to go beyond the bounds of a strict reality. But he is by nature both a painter and a poet. . . .<sup>78</sup>

Preston's effectiveness in deliberative address, especially in legislative speaking, was also weakened by his shortcomings as a debater. Given time for careful preparation, Preston could meet effectively the objections of his opponent and defend his own case. In such "set" efforts he could ferret out the significant points of clash, and demolish his opponents' arguments with valid and adequate argument and evidence. In these refutatory efforts he showed great skill in the use of the reductio ad absurdum, and turning the tables, though few instances of the dilemma appear in his printed speeches. His most effective weapon in debate was the use of his adversary's former testimony to support his own positions. The irony of the weapon had a peculiar appeal to him, and in his hands it became a lethal weapon. In this ability, Preston had no superior in the Senate. In his spontaneous efforts in running debate, however, Preston was often bungling and inept in refutation and rebuttal. In his better moments he could cut and thrust with incredible skill, as some of his clashes with Calhoun show. Oftentimes, however, he argued beside the point, or

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<sup>78</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 294.

made bald, unguarded assertions which were turned against him with telling effect by Benton, Buchanan, or Calhoun. Another of his weaknesses in debate was his propensity for the argumentum ad hominem, which, in the earlier years of his speaking career, particularly, he used to excess. His philippics against Jackson were little more than elaborate personal arguments. Similarly, his perfervid speeches on the removal of the deposits were overcharged with vitriol. As he attained more rhetorical maturity, however, he leaned less heavily upon argument of a personal character.

Of especial importance in analyzing Preston's rational appeal, is the functional evaluation of his leading proposals. "In the long run," say Thonssen and Baird, "integrity of ideas depends also upon the accuracy and potency of the [speaker's] intellectual conceptions in functional existence."<sup>79</sup> The perspective of time enables one to apply this crucial test to Preston's motivative utterance. To what extent were Preston's ideas confirmed by the ebb and flow of events? Both red and black ink must be entered in his ledger. For six years he championed state interposition, and broke a lance in defense of Calhoun's intellectual edifice--an ingenuous deductive theory which historical reality has failed to certify. As shown earlier, however, Preston evidently discerned the impracticability of nullification, abandoning it as a proper solution. Preston's vision was also myopic on the Texas question, for he contended that the annexation of Texas could not involve the United States in a war with Mexico, and that the

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<sup>79</sup>Thonssen and Baird, Speech Criticism, 350.

Southern boundary of Texas was the Rio Grande. As events proved, the "immediate occasion" for hostilities between Mexico and the United States in 1846 was our annexation of Texas and the presumptive claim of Texas to the boundary of the Rio Grande.<sup>80</sup> Preston was also dim-sighted in his overly ardent advocacy of Crittenden's faulty bill to prevent the interference of federal officers in elections.

On the other hand, Preston must be credited with remarkably acute vision on other significant issues. His position on the abolition question overshadows the other instances. In 1836, while the abolition movement was yet in its pupa stage, Preston warned of the dangers inherent in the movement, to which most of his colleagues were indifferent, predicting that unless in some way curbed it would destroy the Union. Events confirmed his judgment. To Preston's credit also was his stout defense of the presidential veto power, which, he maintained, was a "wise check" on congressional usurpation of executive power. Significantly, both Clay and Calhoun advocated removal of the veto power. It can hardly be denied that Preston's stature as an American orator would have been significantly enhanced had he been more consistently brilliant in foreseeing the consequences of his positions on political issues.

In the last analysis, Preston's use of the logical mode of persuasion involves also the matter of intellectual integrity. His ardent nature occasionally vitiated his reasoning. He was unable to

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<sup>80</sup>Eaton, A History of the Old South, 358-359. Eaton claims that "Mexico's position was well founded that the Southern boundary of Texas was the Nueces River."

make the fullest use of deduction in evolving and enforcing his ideas. His vision was not highly accurate. Still, he chose to speak on a high ethical plane, honestly searching for wise answers to the social problems with which he grappled. Perhaps the "Inspired Declaimer" himself deserves the final say. Surveying his long life a year before his death, he reflected, "Of all things the most difficult in life is to fix the just mean wherein truth resides."<sup>81</sup>

The significance of the speaker's character and personality in the persuasive process has been recognized by rhetoricians since pre-Aristotelian times. It would be difficult to over-rate the role of ethical proof in effecting listener credence, for in a very real sense oral suasion is the adaptation of the self of the speaker to the self of the auditor. With masterly good sense Emerson observed, "The reason why anyone refuses his assent to your opinion, or his aid to your benelovent design, is in you."<sup>82</sup> As the speaker engages in the persuasive act, he reveals himself either consciously or unconsciously by what he says and by the way he says it. The linkage between the speaker and the speech is necessarily close, because of the intimate character of public speaking. As Baker observes, "Public speaking is a performing art. The public speaker must present himself as exhibit A. He is both the creator and what is created."<sup>83</sup> It is thus inevitable that the audience's judgment of the speaker's creation is

<sup>81</sup>Yarborough (ed.), Reminiscences of William C. Preston, 81.

<sup>82</sup>Quoted in Thonssen and Baird, Speech Criticism, 383.

<sup>83</sup>V. L. Baker, "The Art of Public Speaking," Vital Speeches of the Day, XVIII (March 1, 1952), 318.

influenced by its judgment of the speaker's self. If the audience likes and respects the speaker because it perceives him to be a man of good sense, of strong character, and good will, it will be disposed to embrace his propositions and ideas.

The hearer's antecedent impressions of the speaker is also frequently a significant factor in the ethical judgment. The auditor may have formed an opinion of the speaker's self prior to observing him at work in the persuasive venture. Unquestionably, these antecedent judgments are influential in shaping the listener's ultimate evaluation of the speaker's ethos.

Preston's rhetorical effectiveness was doubtless derived in large measure from the force of his character, which was such as to command both respect and liking. What manner of man, then, was he? What was the texture of his ethos? His contemporaries were virtually unanimous in attributing to him purity of character. It is of some significance in this connection to note that his tomb bears the simple inscription, "Behold the upright man, for the way of that man is eternal life." True, some of Preston's political enemies ascribed to him dishonorable motives, and, whether true or not, the imputations made against him were doubtless influential in moulding unfavorable impressions of him, particularly in South Carolina. It is also true that Preston's shift in loyalty from Calhoun to Clay may have been prompted in part by an unhealthy ambition. At any rate, the Calhoun press was successful in giving a high measure of credence to the charge. The dominant note struck, nevertheless, in the commentary on Preston's moral character is encomiastic. His private

life appears to have been exemplary. Also, at no time during his political career was he charged with corruption. One writer declared in 1838, "There are few indeed of our public men who, in as brief a period, have created for themselves, in public or private, a character more exalted, and enviable than that which belongs to this Senator."<sup>84</sup> B. F. Perry considered Preston, "One of nature's nobleman, in person, head, and heart,"<sup>85</sup> and Miller characterized him as a man of "grand character."<sup>86</sup>

Another basic trait which influenced Preston's powers of persuasion was his strength of character. He was a man of unusual moral courage, as his letters and speeches show. Self-reliant and high mettled, he made obeisance to no one, and dared to assert his convictions and maintain them with vigor. Preston himself has epitomized forcefully this attribute of his character. In a floor skirmish with the "expungers" he exclaimed, "Thank God, it is not my practice to 'crook the pliant hinges of the knee, that thrift may follow fawning.'"<sup>87</sup> This character trait, dramatized in his failure to follow Calhoun's counsel on state interposition in 1828, was both an asset and a liability to Preston's rhetorical effectiveness. His independance of spirit commanded respect for him, yet so distasteful

<sup>84</sup>Anonymous, Sketches of United States' Senators of the Session 1837-'38, 35.

<sup>85</sup>Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men, II, 56.

<sup>86</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., XI (December, 1899), 594.

<sup>87</sup>Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 24th Cong., 2nd Sess., 214.



to him was servility that he could not resist the temptation to stigmatize the supporters of Jackson and Van Buren as grovelling sycophants. Not infrequently he emasculated his persuasiveness in senatorial debate by indignant outbursts against certain of his colleagues.

Preston's intense earnestness doubtless also contributed to his rhetorical effectiveness. Miller thought that his earnestness was the "beauty of his life and the splendor of his character."<sup>88</sup> His published speeches reveal him as a speaker who got at his subject with sincerity and eagerness, and his contemporaries noted that he was able to "make his subject a part of himself."<sup>89</sup> Often his eagerness was restrained; occasionally it was too intense. Although equipped with a buoyant, cheerful disposition, and a disarming sense of humor, Preston did not stoop to flippancy in his public utterance. Rhetoric was not a "frivolous art," but a serious art for serious purposes. Still, Preston recognized the value of the "light touch" in speaking, as evidenced by his occasional use of wit and humor. Typically, his addresses were fights for strong convictions--fights in which he immersed himself, evincing a compelling sincerity and earnestness.

Preston's personal persuasiveness in popular address was considerably enhanced by his tact. Flagrant flattery was never indulged in. Neither did he compromise his convictions before an audience. But he was an expert in adapting himself to the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes,

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<sup>88</sup>Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., XI (December, 1899), 594.

<sup>89</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 7. See, also, Charleston Courier, May 26, 1860; Columbia Southern Chronicle, May 24, 1860.

and interests of a general audience. Newspaper accounts of his popular speaking seldom failed to mention his tactfulness. One writer, commenting on Preston's 1840 campaign speech at Fredericksburg, Virginia, declared, for example, "To say that he addressed the people is equivalent to saying that he spoke with a tact and popular eloquence with which no one else in this land can speak."<sup>90</sup> His 1840 speech at Elizabethtown, New Jersey, is a study in audience adaptation. In that address he made references to New Jersey's role in the American Revolution, to objects of local pride, to Samuel Southard's role in the struggle between the Whigs and the administration party, and to the gallantry of New Jersey's governor in opposing the administration. He revealed an awareness of the problems of both the New Jersey farmer and the manufacturer. He clothed his ideas in graphic language, employing figures drawn from nature. He sprinkled his address with Biblical allusions. He used maxims frequently, and made free use of "personal words."

In his legislative address, however, Preston frequently displayed a social attitude inimical to rhetorical effectiveness. In his ardent assault on the authors of the "bloody bill" and the expungers, he was little disposed to exhibit tact and moderation, charging them with servility, treachery, selfishness, and ignorance.<sup>91</sup>

In assessing the role of Preston's character and personality in his rhetorical effectiveness, it is essential to note also the

<sup>90</sup>Washington National Intelligencer, July 24, 1840.

<sup>91</sup>See especially his "Speech on Abolition Petitions," "Speech on the Expunging Resolution," "Speech on the Pre-Emption Bill," and "Speech on Removal of the Federal Deposits."

persuasive value of the ethical connotations clustering about his name and reputation. In an address to the Clariosophic and Euphradian Societies of South Carolina College, delivered a year before Preston's death, Bishop Stephen Elliot of Georgia declared, "My tongue cannot express the charm which has always hung around the name of Preston, the charm to the young, the charm to the people, the charm to admiring Senates."<sup>92</sup> Preston's bouyant spirit, his elegant tastes and polished manners, his learning, his poise, and his eloquence, were all ingredients of the popular image of him.

Still more important in the present context, Preston became a living symbol of the cause of individual liberty, even before he reached the pinnacle of his career. His zealous six-year crusade against the oppressions of the protective principle established for him a national reputation as a defender of the rights of the people. His fiery senatorial assaults on the Jackson Administration strengthened that reputation. In 1834 the Philadelphia Enquirer referred to him as "the eloquent and bold-hearted champion of the Constitution";<sup>93</sup> another paper termed him the "sleepless sentinel of the Senate";<sup>94</sup> still another called him the "fearless defender of the people's

<sup>92</sup>Stephen Elliot, Annual Address Before the Clariosophic and Euphradian Societies of the South Carolina College, Delivered December 4, 1859 (Charleston, 1860), 5.

<sup>93</sup>Philadelphia Enquirer, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, December 26, 1834.

<sup>94</sup>Philadelphia United States Gazette, quoted in Washington National Intelligencer, May 5, 1835.

rights."<sup>95</sup> This popular image of Preston was fashioned not alone by the character of his legislative speaking; his blood relationship to Henry, whose life dramatized the cause of freedom, was also a formative factor. Newspaper accounts of Preston frequently compared him to Henry, and allusions to his kinship with Henry were made occasionally by his colleagues in senatorial debate. Preston himself watered and cultivated the image by making subtle references to his orator grand-uncle on the platforms of the country. Unquestionably, these "echoes and values" attaching to Preston's character were significant factors in widening his sphere of influence and in strengthening his ethical appeal.

Preston's obviously conscious efforts in asserting his good sense, revealing his integrity, and accommodating himself to his listeners belong chiefly to his motivative address. Characteristically, he placed his direct ethical appeals in the introductions of his speeches. Significantly, he employed them in his senatorial speeches only when dealing with a highly controversial issue, or one on which his motives might be questioned. In making direct ethical appeals, he was ever careful not to lose his dignity, and to reveal a becoming modesty. The following examples from a number of his motivative addresses serve to illustrate the techniques he employed in direct ethical appeal.

I disavow . . . all hostile purposes, or even ill temper, towards Mexico; and I trust that I impugn neither the policy nor principles of the Administration.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Macon Messenger, quoted in Charleston Courier, July 8, 1835.

<sup>96</sup>Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess.,

God forbid that I should permit any matter of temporary interest or passion to enter into what I am about to tell you of the real dangers which environ us.<sup>97</sup>

For myself, sir, I will continue to look out for, and endeavor to steer my course by, the steady light of experience.<sup>98</sup>

But, sir, I will take higher ground than all this.<sup>99</sup>

Preston was alert to the persuasive efficacy of emotional appeal, and one of his greatest strengths as an orator resided in his ability to command the emotions of his auditors. An analysis of the total body of his printed speeches reveals clearly his consummate skill in touching off the feelings of his hearers; the testimony of his contemporaries attest to it. The oratorical critic of Preston's day expressed an enthusiasm for fervid utterance which it is difficult for present-day critics to appreciate. A favorite theme among nineteenth-century oratorical critics was the role of passion in public address. One writer urged, for example, "Human passion is the force to which the orator must appeal, and the lever with which he must gain his ends."<sup>100</sup> Baskerville finds the "gentle Emerson" expressing disappointment at not having caught "some sparks of the Typhonic rage" at a political convention he attended in 1845.<sup>101</sup>

There was virtually universal agreement among the critics of

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 24th Cong., 1st Sess., 221.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 25th Cong., 1st Sess., 89.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 343.

<sup>100</sup>"Eloquence," American Quarterly Review, XXI (June, 1837), 295.

<sup>101</sup>Barnet Baskerville, "Emerson as a Critic of Oratory," Southern Speech Journal, XVIII (March, 1953), 154.

Preston's speaking that he was an expert in commanding the feelings of his listeners. So impressed with Preston's ability was Magoon that he asked, "Where is his competitor, who can excel him in lucid, fiery, and captivating declamation?"<sup>102</sup> Another critic believed Preston "remarkable for a winning power of eloquence, which charms and captivates the feelings."<sup>103</sup> Still another considered Preston not less than the peer of "the great triumvirate" in his ability "to arouse the feelings and wield the passions."<sup>104</sup>

Preston employed numerous techniques to gain emotional support. A favorite and effective technique was to offer a verbal description of his own feelings. Thus, for example, in his "Speech on the Expunging Resolution," he declared, "I feel a sort of impossibility of withholding the expression of my utter repugnance to this proceeding,"<sup>105</sup> and in his 1840 address at Elizabethtown he referred to the "experiments" of the "spoils party," avowing, "I can ill suppress the indignation I feel."<sup>106</sup>

Difficult to assess, though nonetheless operative in energizing Preston's propositions, was his animated physical delivery, so frequently noted by his contemporaries. His own intense emotions suffused his delivery, and through the principle of empathy aroused

<sup>102</sup>Magoon, Living Orators in America, 349.

<sup>103</sup>Quoted in Charleston Courier, May 24, 1860.

<sup>104</sup>Columbia Southern Guardian, May 26, 1860.

<sup>105</sup>"Speech on the Expunging Resolution," Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 24th Cong., 2nd Sess., 136.

<sup>106</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, August 20, 1840.



emotional excitation in his audience. It is true that his most persistent sobriquet, "the Inspired Declaimer," owes something to the dynamic, colorful nature of his physical delivery. William John Grayson, contrasting the delivery of Preston and Edward Everett, wrote, "One was all fire, the other all ice."<sup>107</sup>

Preston was also fully alive to the infectious power of words, and was a master at painting word pictures calculated to induce a favorable affective state in his hearers. Thus, in his "Speech on the Expunging Resolution," he sought to arouse a feeling of disgust by a pictorial characterization of the expunging "deed."

Your clerk . . . is to perform the duty of a common hangman. Might it not be as well to order in a file of soldiers with their bayonets? Or would it not be better still to purify the journal by fire? Fire is the ancient ordeal. Give the victim to the flames; and then, like a company of the native Sagamores, sit around and inhale the agreeable fragrance as the smoke of the guilty lines shall darkly ascend to heaven.<sup>108</sup>

In connection with his attempts to stir his auditors' feelings through affective language, Preston ran the gamut of techniques. Typically, as in the example above, he made heavy use of sensory verbs and nouns, allusion, and figures. Typically, too, as in this instance, he employed a feverish, staccato rhythmic pattern, calculated to grip his auditors' attention and fire their blood with his own emotions.

Preston's effectiveness in touching off the attitudes and feelings of his listeners was also enhanced by his skill in motivating

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<sup>107</sup>Stoney (ed.), "Autobiography of William John Grayson," *loc. cit.*, 135.

<sup>108</sup>"Speech on the Expunging Resolution," Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 24th Cong., 2nd Sess., 137.

human wants. He gave driving force to his arguments most often in motivative address by appeals to self-preservation, pride, altruism, and the desire to maintain the status quo. The master appeals of his six-year rhetorical crusade in behalf of state interposition were those of self-preservation and pride. The appeals to self-preservation consisted largely of statements intended to arouse his auditors to the social, political, and economic dangers inherent in the operation of the tariff laws. His most effective weapon was perhaps the appeal to pride. Independent and proud himself, he understood the blazing sectional and state pride of the Carolinian. Such passages as the following, taken from his 1832 philippic against Jackson, were used to fan the embers of pride. "Who, and where, are we? Are we Russian serfs; or slaves of a Divan? Are we on the banks of the Bosphorus, or the Neva? Or is it on our own free streams that these things are proclaimed?"<sup>109</sup>

In all of his notable senatorial efforts, Preston appealed to the motive of self-preservation, employing most frequently, and with telling effect, statements designed to arouse his colleagues' fear of impending loss of individual liberties and state rights. His "Speech on Abolition Petitions" is, for example, little more than an elaborate appeal to self-preservation. Furthermore, the staple appeal of his 1840 campaign addresses was to the motive of self-preservation. Reduced to its lowest terms, his argument ran, The "reign of experiments" has blighted the economy of the nation, and has trampled ruthlessly over individual and state rights. If the "spoils party" is

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<sup>109</sup>Charleston Mercury, December 20, 1832.

not expelled from power, the system of "unequal plunder" will destroy the nation's economy and the peoples' liberty.<sup>110</sup>

The basic appeal utilized by Preston in his senatorial speeches was to a desire to maintain the status quo. A political conservative, he wrestled mightily with the advocates of change--the "experimenters" of the Jackson Administration, and the abolitionists. He revered the old; he had faith in the tried, and applied his rhetorical genius to the preservation of the Constitution and the laws, the institution of slavery, senatorial equipoise, and the institution of banking. In all of his leading senatorial addresses Preston strove to motivate his arguments by appeals to a desire to preserve the integrity of the status quo.

In conjunction with the appeal to a desire to maintain the status quo, Preston frequently employed the motive of altruism. Seldom did he utilize this drive outside the context of the status quo appeal. For example, in his "Speech on Abolition Petitions" he sought to link the altruistic drive to his proposition, pleading with Northern senators to resist by the strongest measures possible the reckless activities of the abolitionists. Also, in his "Speech on the Annexation of Texas" he pleaded with the Senate to assist the South in resisting the "prurient and drunken philanthropy" of the abolitionists by adding Texas to the territory of the slave states. "Give us safety and repose," he pleaded, "by doing now what all your most trusted and distinguished statesmen have been so long anxious to

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<sup>110</sup>See, for example, "Speech at Elizabethtown, New Jersey," Columbia Southern Chronicle, August 20, 1840.

do."<sup>111</sup>

Perhaps there was more than a grain of truth in the judgment of the Washington correspondent of the Portland Advertiser who, after hearing Preston speak for the first time, observed, "Never was there a man more calculated to bewitch the people than this Preston."<sup>112</sup> He was an expert in kindling the emotions of a popular audience; he was also skilled in premising his arguments upon powerful human wants. It is unquestionably true that his capacity to "wield the sceptre in the realm of passion" (as he put it), compensated rhetorically in large measure for his shortcomings in the use of the logical mode of persuasion.

Preston's rhetorical effectiveness was perhaps more heavily dependent upon style than upon any other of the various departments of oral discourse. Many of his contemporaries commented on the distinctiveness and power of his style, and one historian, contrasting Preston's and Calhoun's stylistic powers, has observed, "Despite Calhoun's almost matchless gifts as a debater . . . it was not always easy for him to overthrow the argument of his colleague, clothed in glowing, polished, stirring English of which Calhoun was incapable."<sup>113</sup> The pattern and verbal texture of Preston's speeches reflect remarkably his character and personality, illustrating Buffon's dictum,

<sup>111</sup>Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 558.

<sup>112</sup>Portland Advertiser, quoted in Charleston Mercury, March 7, 1834.

<sup>113</sup>Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 474.

"The style is the man himself."<sup>114</sup> It cannot be contended that Preston's style was an open revelation of his qualities of mind, yet in it are to be seen unmistakable echoes of his assertiveness, his emotional fervor, his imaginativeness, and his cultivated taste.

In the structuring of his oral discourse Preston was a careful craftsman.<sup>115</sup> Characteristically, he employed the rhetorical order in developing the larger units of his discourses. His exordia were typically overlong, almost invariably discursive, and often containing a melange of statements involving the significance of the topic, his efforts to subdue his own feelings about the issue of debate, his observations on the direction of the debate, his views of the causes of public concern about the question, clarification of the points at issue in the debate, removal of preliminary semantic obstacles, and his shift in point of view with regard to the question under discussion. So elaborate and discursive were the introductions of certain of his leading senatorial speeches, that they often lost proportion, and indubitably weakened audience attention and interest.

Preston was careful, however, to enunciate clearly his rhetorical objective, as the following examples, taken from a typical body

<sup>114</sup>Lane Cooper, Theories of Style (New York, 1907), 170.

<sup>115</sup>The present analysis proceeds from the assumption that the oratorical critic may profitably regard style as subsuming both the disposing and verbal aspects of rhetoric. One writer has suggested that "perhaps the critic will come closest to grappling with the distinctiveness of the rhetorical work if he considers more attentively than has been his wont the idea of style as the order and movement which we give to our thoughts." Donald C. Bryant, "Of Style," Western Speech, XXI (Spring, 1957), 110.

of his addresses, show.

I am prepared to demonstrate that the Committee maintain that it is the bounden duty of the Executive officers to interfere in elections.<sup>116</sup>

I will now proceed to show that the territory actually occupied by the Republic of Texas was at one time a part of the United States.<sup>117</sup>

I now make, on behalf of South Carolina, her public and solemn protest against this open and flagrant violation of the Constitution.<sup>118</sup>

How wide their [Industry and genius] joint conquests, is shown in the life of Hugh S. Legare, which I now propose to sketch.<sup>119</sup>

In the patterning of his ideas, Preston showed a marked preference for the distributive and logical methods. An example of his effective use of the distributive method is his eulogy on Legare, in which he divided his materials according to the various pursuits of Legare's life. Nowhere is his ability to handle the logical method better illustrated than in his speech on the annexation of Texas in which he partitioned his material according to the issues he had developed as a proponent of the proposed course of action. An examination of his printed addresses reveals his sensitivity to the need for clarity and relevancy in the patterning of ideas.

The cardinal weakness of Preston's rhetorical structuring lay

<sup>116</sup>"Speech on the Bill to Prevent the Interference of Federal Officers in Elections," Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 339.

<sup>117</sup>"Speech on the Annexation of Texas," ibid., 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 556.

<sup>118</sup>"Speech on the Expunging Resolution," ibid., 24th Cong., 2nd Sess., 136.

<sup>119</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 5.



in his virtual indifference to the "joints" of his speeches--to transitional phrases and sentences. "Scaffold words" he used sparingly, tucking them into his sentences, rather than setting them at the beginning. While the reader of his printed addresses may follow with relative ease the progression of his ideas, it is doubtful that his listeners were always able to do so. Nonetheless, there can be little doubt that his audiences failed to grasp his rhetorical objective or to understand his central theme, for he made heavy use of internal summaries. Such summaries were typically subtle, colorful, and climactic; seldom were they conventional and obvious. Thus, it is doubtless true that his use of internal summaries compensated rhetorically for his deficiencies in the use of transitional statements.

Preston handled the conclusions of his addresses with deftness and force, characteristically making a plea for acceptance of his proposition. Examination of his motivative addresses shows that he developed considerably in his ability to handle perorations as he acquired more practice. The closing appeals of some of his earlier motivative speeches were melodramatic and overly fervid. By the time he had reached the height of his senatorial career, however, he had developed the ability to conclude smartly, enlisting the emotions of his listeners in his cause, yet keeping scrupulously within the bounds of good taste. As the following example shows, he learned also how to give a final motivated impetus to his conclusions by the use of parallel structure and quotation.

Give us safety and repose, by doing now what all your most trusted and distinguished statesmen have been so long anxious to do. . . . Grant us this just and humble boon, by repairing the violated integrity of your territory,

by augmenting your wealth and power, by extending the empire of law, liberty, and christianity. Give it to us, and you will accomplish that "which is the greatest interest of every true American, the consolidation of our Union, in which is involved our prosperity, felicity, safety--perhaps our national existence." Mr. President, with these words of Washington I conclude.<sup>120</sup>

Preston was a sensitive stylist, developing during his oratorical career two fairly distinct modes of expression, each of which was calculated to do a particular rhetorical job. One--a fervid, staccato style--belongs to his hortatory utterances. The other--an elegant style--belongs to his inspirational address. If these general classifications be not conceived as precise, mutually exclusive categories, but rather as general critical touchstones, they may be helpful in providing insight into the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the texture of Preston's discourse.

Preston's fervid style is illustrated by the following excerpts, taken from four of his motivative addresses:

The world should be told that, before they plant such principles as his [Jackson's] upon our free soil, the bones of many an enemy shall whiten our shores--the carcasses of many a caitiff and traitor, blacken our air!<sup>121</sup>

Why not expunge those who made the record? Men who entered so foul a page upon your Journals cannot be worthy of a seat here. Remove us. Turn us out. Expel us from the Senate. Would to God you could! Call out the praetorian guard. Take us--apprehend us--march us off.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>"Speech on the Annexation of Texas," Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 558.

<sup>121</sup>"Speech on Jackson's Proclamation," Charleston Mercury, December 20, 1832.

<sup>122</sup>"Speech on the Expunging Resolution," Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 24th Cong., 2nd Sess., 136.

My state has been assailed. Be it so. My peculiar principles have been denounced. I submit to it. Sarcasms, intended to be bitter, have been uttered against us. Let them pass. I will not permit myself to be disturbed by these things, or, by retorting them, throw any suspicion on the temper in which I solemnly warn both sections of this Union of the impending dangers.<sup>123</sup>

You are expelled from the Union, and yet you endure. Fellow-citizens did I say? I am not your fellow citizen. You are not citizens of the United States. You have been turned out of it, and a manufactory of representatives have been set up at Washington, which turns out subjects as the machine turns out tenpenny nails.<sup>124</sup>

Typically, Preston's fervid bursts were intense dramatisations of an idea, propelled by his super-heated emotion and imagination. They were, as he put it, "arguments alive and in motion." They were calculated to enchain the auditor's senses, and to fire his feelings: to motivate him to conviction or to action. Compositionally, Preston employed them to swing minor and major climaxes. Almost invariably, they appear as climactic crescendos at the end of a long expository or narrative passage. It should be noted, however, that his "Speech on the Expunging Resolution" is constructed almost entirely out of this mode of expression.

His fervid style possessed the qualities of clearness, force, and ease. He achieved clearness and force largely through the use of specific, concrete words, which evoked buried sensory images. He followed generally his own directives of diction, namely, (1) "Never

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<sup>123</sup>"Speech on Abolition Petitions," *ibid.*, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 556.

<sup>124</sup>"Speech at Elizabethtown, New Jersey," *Columbia Southern Chronicle*, August 20, 1840.

use a long word when a short one will do as well! (2) "avoid derivatives as much as possible."<sup>125</sup> As the examples above indicate, Preston employed crackling syntax. Typically, he avoided parentheses, moving directly through his thought in terse, straightforward, sentences. Occasionally he amplified an idea through a series of crisp, imperative sentences, in which the thought was given bulk by a succession of verb-adverb shifts, as in the following instance, "Remove us. Turn us out. Expel us from the Senate. . . . Call out the praetorian guard. Take us--apprehend us--march us off." Another technique for achieving a dynamic sentence movement is illustrated by the following passage, in which the longer sentence is played against the jolting, short sentence, "My state has been assailed. Be it so. My peculiar principles have been denounced. I submit to it. Sarcasms, intended to be bitter, have been uttered against us. Let them pass." Welding his technique with the emotion expressed, he also frequently set euphony against cacophony and played sharply contrasting images against each other as, for example, in the statement "the bones of many an enemy shall whiten our shores--the carcasses of many a caitiff and traitor, blacken our air." He also played the rhetorical question against the statement, and the imperative sentence against the exclamatory sentences. He infused his sentence movement with abrupt terminations. In short, he so managed sentence movement, as to achieve a feverish, staccato rhythm.

The following example is illustrative of Preston's elegant

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<sup>125</sup>Quoted in Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., XI (November, 1899), 531.

style.

To confer upon learning its just dignity and importance, it must be considered as subsidiary and auxiliary to the paramount ends of our being. It must always have in view our responsibilities in this life, and the awful responsibilities of a far more exceeding weight hereafter. You are to be made intellectual men, that you may be fit moral agents; so that as you advance in learning, you may advance in the knowledge and appreciation of virtue, remembering always that the lamp which you light up is not a gaudy show, to please by its variegated radiance, but is intended for a more useful and noble purpose, to show you, amidst the double night of error and passion which obscures your journey through life, the only ways of pleasantness and paths of peace.<sup>126</sup>

Characteristically, Preston used this mode of expression when engaged with ideas of weight or with exalted emotions. Although the style of graceful elegance was characteristic of his ceremonial address, he also used it in handling the exposition and argumentation of his motivative speeches. His elegant style carried a preponderance of Latiny, learned words, often violating his injunctions on word choice. Typically, too, his sentences were longer, and less varied in length and type. He also employed more periodic sentences and more complex sentences in the elegant style. The rhythms of this style were therefore long and rolling, not fitful and discursive. They were literary rhythms, not those of spontaneous talk.

The great merit of Preston's verbal expression was its pictorial quality. He exhausted the devices for securing vividness, using sensory words, metaphor and simile, personification, allusion,

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<sup>126</sup>Preston, Address to the Students of South Carolina College, 8.



and illustration. Ordinarily his figures were fresh, apt, and evocative, and his allusions were geared to audience understanding. An examination of a body of eight typical addresses reveals that ninety-two per cent of his allusions were drawn from the Bible and from Shakespeare's plays. The remaining eight per cent were references to history and to nature. Interestingly, his Shakespeare allusions were almost entirely references to the tragedies of Macbeth, Hamlet, and Othello. Interestingly, too, he frequently misquoted the literary selections.

To Preston's credit also is his avoidance of flamboyant utterance in an age that celebrated the swelling, rococo period. It seems paradoxical that a nineteenth-century orator of emotional ardor and warm imagination should not have been ensnared by excessive embellishment. Yet it is hardly a mystery, when viewed in the light of Preston's training. As one contemporary put it, "His imagination, which is luxuriant, is bridled down by a severe and curbing taste."<sup>127</sup> The influence of Irving and Blair is suggested. Preston's style was not entirely devoid of blemishes, however, in the area of adornment. He had an almost boyish enthusiasm for alliteration, and during the earlier part of his speaking career, particularly, he studded his addresses with alliterative phrases, such, for example as, "civil and servile," "stolid stoicism," "frothy philanthropy," "mixed multitude," "play tricks with truth," and "cold continuity." This, however, is a minor charge when considered in the light of his eschewing the purple patches which characterize, for example, much of Webster's

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<sup>127</sup>Anonymous, Sketches of United States' Senators of the Session of 1837-'38, 33.



ceremonial address.

In brief, Preston was a word-painter who was keenly alive to the fact that the average member of a nineteenth century audience wanted a fluent, impassioned eloquence of pictures, not abstruse, aridly verbalized webs of logic. "Men spoke of him as the wondrous descriptive orator, whose magic pictures of beauty and glory and majesty had spell bound breathless senates and ravished thronging multitudes--this magician, potent ruler of the stormy passions of men, whose breath was agitation!"<sup>128</sup>

No little of Preston's rhetorical impact on his audiences is attributable to his delivery. Significant is La Borde's testimony that "with his fine powers of elocution all were fascinated."<sup>129</sup> Most impressive, however, is John Quincy Adams' wistful exclamation, "Oh for his elocution!"<sup>130</sup>

While there is a dearth of evidence relative to Preston's mode of delivery, a synthesis of the whole of it indicates that he ordinarily spoke extemporaneously from notes. For the most part, available texts of his speeches are imperfect accounts from the pens of reporters, though he evidently wrote out for publication some of his major senatorial addresses. His two leading ceremonial addresses were also prepared by him for publication, and these were reported to have been

<sup>128</sup>J. L. Bryan, quoted in Miller, "William C. Preston," loc. cit., XI (December, 1899), 589.

<sup>129</sup>La Borde, History of the South Carolina College, 292.

<sup>130</sup>Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, X, 241.

delivered from manuscript.<sup>131</sup>

Preston's own testimony on his mode of delivery is most significant. To Lieber he wrote in 1837, "I . . . have composed only under the emotion of delivery--so that to write is not only irksome but impossible. . . ."<sup>132</sup> In this connection it is revealing that on two occasions at least, when requested to submit a speech for publication, Preston declined. His comment in one instance was, "It would be like dressing up a corpse."<sup>133</sup> In the second instance he offered the excuse, "I spoke from scanty notes."<sup>134</sup> His power of extemporaneous speech was the object of much comment, and newspaper correspondents often referred to his efforts as being "presented extemporaneously." He was reported to have made his hour-long reply to Clay on abolition of the presidential veto power "without any special preparation whatsoever."<sup>135</sup> Magoon observed of Preston's delivery, "Extemporaneous speech is this orator's forte, and in this department he is without a superior in this land or age."<sup>136</sup>

Without question, Preston's effectiveness arose in part from his physical characteristics. There is virtual agreement that he was a man of imposing, prepossessing mien. To some of his enemies, he appeared as a baronial Virginia gentleman, suave and proud-crested.

<sup>131</sup>It is interesting to note that the various collections of Preston MSS contain no notes from which he might have spoken.

<sup>132</sup>Preston to Lieber, Washington, D. C., July 16, 1837, Francis Lieber Papers.

<sup>133</sup>Charleston Courier, May 25, 1860.

<sup>134</sup>Quoted in Carlisle, Addresses of J. H. Carlisle, 185.

<sup>135</sup>Columbia Southern Chronicle, February 2, 1842.

<sup>136</sup>Magoon, Living Orators in America, 393.

In the main, however, Preston's auditors found him stately and commanding, but warmly human. A number of his contemporaries thought his personal appearance strikingly like that of Cicero. Descriptions of Preston indicate that he was tall and somewhat corpulent, with a rather large, ruddy, strong-featured face, "positively red" hair, and a slender neck. Not a few observers commented on his "perfect teeth"; some noted, too, that his chest was broad, and that his shoulders were slightly rounded. By all accounts, Preston was punctilious in his personal grooming.<sup>137</sup>

Preston's platform manner, and his control of the visible and audible symbols of utterance, evoked a flood of admiring comment from reporters and newspaper correspondents. One who observed closely his artistic control of pronuntiatio described him in this way:

You observe Mr. Preston commences his remarks in a subdued tone, though his enunciation is so distinct and slow that we have no difficulty in hearing every word. As he proceeds and warms with his subject he becomes more animated; his eyes light up, his voice becomes louder, his countenance begins to speak, his utterance is more rapid, and his hands and arms "suit the action to the word" in a very energetic and graceful manner.<sup>138</sup>

Preston could immerse himself in the intenseness of his emotions through a flair for acting. In one of his 1840 campaign speeches he delighted a partisan throng by "distinctly splitting his face into two separate hemispheres of expression. There was a patronising

<sup>137</sup>Charleston Courier, May 24, 1860; Rivers, Anecdotes About Our Literary Men; Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel, I, 179; Nevins (ed.), The Diary of Philip Hone, I, 459; Washington National Intelligencer, June 8, 1836.

<sup>138</sup>Philadelphia United States Gazette, quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, September 1, 1841.

quiet look for the South and a twinkle for the North. The crowd recognized it as a portrayal of Van Buren and forced him by applause to continue it for a moment."<sup>139</sup> One writer who observed the "pyrotechnics" of Preston's delivery, asserted, "Booth is but a second rate player in comparison."<sup>140</sup>

Preston's voice, cultivated from early boyhood, was magnificent, by all reports. Of the role of voice in delivery, he once remarked, "There is full many a tone of thought and feeling beyond the reach of words or action, which are vibrated to the heart by the voice only."<sup>141</sup> From a composite of judgments, it may be inferred that Preston's voice quality was richly resonant. "Melodious" and "musical" were terms frequently used to describe his voice quality.<sup>142</sup> His rate of speaking was characteristically rapid, though he ordinarily opened his addresses at a leisurely rate, gradually accelerating as he moved into his subject. In running debate, however, he sometimes sprang to his feet "talking as rapidly and as fluently as any business man who had a quick bargain to drive."<sup>143</sup> Preston's voice was highly flexible and well-managed in conveying subtleties of thought and feeling. One observer noted that he kept his voice "under perfect control";<sup>144</sup>

<sup>139</sup>Carlisle, Addresses of J. H. Carlisle, 183.

<sup>140</sup>Portland Advertiser, quoted in Charleston Mercury, March 7, 1834.

<sup>141</sup>Preston, Eulogy on Hugh S. Legare, 26.

<sup>142</sup>Preston, Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 147; Anonymous, Sketches of United States' Senators of the Session 1837-'38, 33.

<sup>143</sup>Charleston Mercury, March 7, 1834.

<sup>144</sup>Rion, Eulogy on William C. Preston, 7.

another wrote that "his intonation [Is] apparently studied, but natural."<sup>145</sup> Vocal energy and distinctness of articulation made him heard and understood. It was one observer's opinion that Preston "could whisper and you could hear him in the furthest corner of the Assembly. He could send forth thunder peals and almost shake you off your feet."<sup>146</sup> Another wrote that "he was distinctly heard by the most remote of the largest audiences he addressed."<sup>147</sup>

While there is a considerable degree of conflicting testimony relative to Preston's bodily communication, it is quite evident that the impact of his utterances owed much to skillful control of the visual aspects of presentation. Preston entered upon his speeches with the advantages of a fine personal appearance. His presence radiated gentle breeding, touched with suavity. With easy purposefulness he assumed his platform position, managing gracefully the flowing drapery of a splendid cloak. If he had not already captured the attention of his auditors, he did so as he threw his searching eyes across the countenances before him. A composite of contemporary opinion indicates that his bodily action, vigorous and profuse, was sensitively attuned to his ideas and feelings; his movements assisted him in conveying his messages with clarity and point. Of his bodily control one observer remarked, "His action is full of energy, full of life, full of spirit, full of emotion, full of nature, and, I may add,

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<sup>145</sup>Rivers, *Anecdotes About Our Literary Men*.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

<sup>147</sup>Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 147.

full of grace."<sup>148</sup> Harriet Martineau, a deaf foreign traveler, who watched the Carolinian once from the Senate gallery, wrote, "I never before understood the eloquence of action. It is easy to see that he could not speak without abundant use of action, and that he has therefore done wisely in making it a study. To an unaccustomed eye it appears somewhat exuberant; but it is exquisitely graceful, and far more than commonly appropriate."<sup>149</sup> Another observer thought that "every turn of his head, every bodily movement [was] graceful";<sup>150</sup> and yet others described his action as "natural and graceful."<sup>151</sup> Significant also is the observation of one writer who thought that Preston's action was "easy," and that it was "subdued from the vehemence which the ardor of his temperament would beget, to a degree of chastened earnestness."<sup>152</sup> A dissonant note is struck only by Perry, who was convinced that Preston's gestures were "too awkward" to be "graceful or studied."<sup>153</sup>

Consideration of Preston's vocal and bodily communication leads to the insistent question, To what extent was his oratorical impact the result of these effervescent elements of public address? Little remains of Preston's public utterance; the published addresses

<sup>148</sup>Norfolk Herald, quoted in Charleston Mercury, March 7, 1834.

<sup>149</sup>Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel, I, 181.

<sup>150</sup>Rivers, Anecdotes About Our Literary Men.

<sup>151</sup>Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, 147.

<sup>152</sup>Anonymous, Sketches of United States' Senators of the Session of 1837-'38, 33.

<sup>153</sup>Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men, II, 56.



forming the basis of the present study constitute only a small fragment of the total body of his speaking. Preston did not commit to writing many of his leading rhetorical efforts. His famous speech in defense of Judge James, his celebrated efforts in the cause of nullification, and many of his leading 1840 campaign addresses are but a few of his efforts that are irretrievably lost. His mode of delivery as well as his aversion to writing account to some extent for the dearth of published productions. Still another factor invites inquiry. The most persistent contemporary indictment of Preston's oratory was that it lacked the substance and force of argument requisite to utterance of stature. One foreign observer commented, "He has . . . the good sense not to have his speeches published, which everyone likes to hear but which would not gain from a severe criticism of the arguments which he puts forward."<sup>154</sup> To the same point was Forcher's opinion that Preston's "speeches could not bear reporting."<sup>155</sup> Magoon also declared, "His written eloquence is not devoid of admirable traits, but it is his spoken eloquence--as heard, felt, seen, in himself alone, that is so rarely excelled."<sup>156</sup> Perhaps Preston's failure to commit to writing many of his leading addresses was prompted in part by his own realization that the majestic fire that impelled and enforced his delivery could never appear in the cold printed record of his thoughts and feelings. At least one contemporary believed so, declaring that

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<sup>154</sup>Hulsemann, *Sur Les Principaux Membres du Congres.*

<sup>155</sup>Stoney (ed.), "Memoirs of Frederick Adolphus Forcher," *loc. cit.*, 80.

<sup>156</sup>Magoon, *Living Orators in America*, 392.

Preston neglected the publishing of his addresses "in the consciousness that he could not faithfully portray himself in the spontaneous efforts of his oratory."<sup>157</sup>

May Preston's oratorical influence, then, be regarded as ephemeral, or did he exercise through his rhetorical efforts a worthwhile, durable social influence? Was he an effective speaker, as gauged by his discovery and application of the rhetorical resources accessible to him? These interrelated inquiries invite joint consideration.

It is of some importance in appraising Preston's oratorical influence that the age to which he spoke accorded him pre-eminence. Though his America teemed with oratorical masters, he was universally regarded as one of the nation's best orators. His rise to oratorical distinction was little short of phenomenal; his ability to sustain his reputation for so long a period is an admirable accomplishment. After a six-year period of legal pleading, he became almost overnight the leading rhetorical voice for nullification, and, as one commentator observes, "feeblar spirits caught hope and courage from its sound."<sup>158</sup> Entering the Senate in 1833, "he at once took rank with the first orators of the Union--reaching, at a single bound, that eminence which John Randolph & Henry Clay had to toil ten years to attain."<sup>159</sup> In 1841 John Quincy Adams termed him the ablest orator in either

<sup>157</sup>Quoted in Charleston Mercury, May 25, 1860.

<sup>158</sup>"An Unchanged Nullifier," quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, July 16, 1840.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

House, and in 1842, the year of Preston's retirement, Adams considered him one of "the ablest men and most efficient Whigs in Congress."<sup>160</sup> Adams' commentary is particularly noteworthy since it is reluctant testimony. In the campaigns of 1840 and 1844, Preston sustained and extended his celebrity as an orator. His renown did not rest merely on the plaudits of the masses whom he "delighted and instructed." Some of the most exacting critics of the times expressed their approbation; among them were Webster, Clay, Legare, Everett, Buchanan, and Adams.

It is important also to remember that, unlike such orators as Everett, for example, Preston did not build his reputation upon skill in only one form of speech-making. Rather, he demonstrated rhetorical flexibility and versatility in his practice, becoming a champion in the fields of judicial, legislative, and ceremonial address. An appraisal of his oratorical effectiveness and influence may, therefore, be addressed to his work in each of these areas.

In the realm of judicial address, governed not only by tested rhetorical principles and techniques, but also by the strictures of legal procedure, Preston demonstrated an admirable competency. An examination of his few extant legal arguments reveals his ability in logical structure and logical argument. His knowledge of statutes, according to his contemporaries was scarcely profound, yet his researches were meticulous, and his ability to discover basic legal principles applicable to his case was acute. While he exhibited care

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<sup>160</sup>Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, XI, 249.

in argument he did not neglect motive appeal, brilliant imagery and illustration, and persuasive physical delivery. His forte was therefore the jury trial rather than the appeal case, and his high percentage of favorable verdicts attests to his rhetorical effectiveness in judicial address.

Preston's oratorical career was devoted primarily to motivative address of the legislative type. From 1828 to 1832, Preston was the great protagonist of nullification in the South Carolina legislature, and without question his persistent and pungent rhetoric was an influential agent in bringing about the Nullification Convention of 1832. It was perhaps his greatest rhetorical victory. Calhoun furnished the blueprint for social action; Preston illuminated it with fervid, polished phrase, and gave it motivative impetus by an unquieting appeal to South Carolina pride and self-preservation. In nullification, however, there was merely anodyne, and his greatest victory became a mockery, a delusion, and a snare.

His address here, as well as his senatorial address of nine years, was pitched upon a high ethical plane, even though it may have lacked depth and logical force. In the Senate Preston addressed his cultivated mind, ardent patriotism, and compelling rhetoric to the perplexing social problems and issues which commanded the intellectual resources of a generation of able, ante-bellum statesmen. His was a conservative rhetorical voice.

On the questions involving sectional conflict--abolition petitions, the "gag rule," and the annexation of Texas he defended the old agrarian order, an attitude scarcely compatible with the

view supporting the puissant national state demanded by the industrial economy of the North. Preston reflects the conservative moral tone of the pre-civil war period of expansion and change. Characterizing this period, one writer declared:

the shift from an agrarian to an industrial economy was assured, with all that shift implied in the evolution of social and political institutions. It was a period of intellectual ferment in which the old merchantilist and planter world was cracking beneath the mighty blows of industrial capitalism and technological change. The Constitution of the United States represented the best in seventeenth and eighteenth century political thought, but without reinterpretation it could never have survived the first half century of its existence.<sup>161</sup>

On the myriad issues and forces which these great changes threw into the political arena--the questions of state rights, protectionism, internal improvements, sectional rivalries, and slavery--Preston's was a minority voice, and his victories were consequently few. He often faced situations which were perhaps scarcely amenable to oral suasion. Yet he did not make the most efficacious use of the means of persuasion, particularly the logical means. His logical invention was hampered by more than one factor. He appears to have been incapable of penetrating the complex social matrix of his times with sufficient depth to evolve appropriate programs for social action. Clay became the embodiment of, and chief spokesman for, benevolent paternalism, the blueprint for which was the American System. Calhoun was able to invent and refine a "constitutional doctrine that would in itself be an adequate defense of the old

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<sup>161</sup>Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Sectionalist, 481.



agrarian order." No such depth and breadth of logical invention belonged to Preston, who, while able to illuminate the issues of debate with a wealth of learning and occasional flashes of logical brilliance, could not draw up big plans for social action. His "Speech on Abolition Petitions," for example, showed remarkable intellectual acuity, but in the end he inquired of Northern senators, "Let us know what you can do." His advocacy of the annexation of Texas, his most ingenuous plan for achieving Southern safety, was neither a scheme of wisdom nor an integral part of a comprehensive scheme for solving the disturbing sectional problems.

Perhaps, too, Preston's logical invention was also hampered to some extent by the hobgoblin of consistency in political behavior, which served to bridle down his inventive genius. So preoccupied was he with consistency, that the great burden of his newspaper defenses of his political course was the even tenor of his route. Virtually worshipping at the shrine of uniformity and, perhaps, also, wont to place too much emphasis upon men, too little upon measures, he passed by opportunities for snatching extra logical force. Still, Preston's rhetoric was unquestionably influential in preserving individual liberties, for he was one of the country's most zealous guardians of civil liberties during his senatorial career. One contemporary believed that history would place Preston "beside his ancestor, Patrick Henry, as a full equal, not only in eloquence, but also in patriotism."<sup>162</sup>

Preston's oratory was, moreover, a significant factor in the

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<sup>162</sup>Quoted in Columbia Southern Chronicle, July 16, 1840.



development of the Whig party. As a member of the Whig coalition, he helped to congeal the elements which later developed into an organized party. Likewise, he was a propulsive force in the campaign of 1840, employing his rhetorical powers to help achieve the first Whig presidential victory. He tasted defeat, however, in his efforts of 1844 in behalf of Clay, though in that campaign he played only a minor role.

Difficult of assessment, though nonetheless worthy of note, was Preston's oratorical influence as an enunciator of certain cardinal ideals of his times. Using masterfully the available means of rhetoric, he cultivated the ideals of good taste and of oratorical, intellectual, religious, and moral excellence. As a ceremonial orator Preston may deserve at last a greater distinction than his times was able to recognize and accord to him.

On last analysis, Preston achieved genuine stature as an orator. He was hardly ephemeral; he was certainly not florid. Possessing one of the most cultivated minds and finest rhetorical backgrounds of his day, he addressed himself to legal and political questions, as well as to cultural themes. He was competent in locating and employing the available means of rhetoric, yet he did not exercise the influence which he might have because of his deficiencies in logical invention. His power lay in his ability to command the verbal and physical elements of rhetoric--the elements of language and delivery. He was a phrase-smith, an illuminator and dramatizer of schemes and ideas. Others excelled him in ability to create the arrows of oral suasion; few surpassed him in ability to feather the arrows with

vivid, Saxon English, compelling motive appeal, and disarming delivery. In this ability lay his genius. Out of this ability, largely, his rhetorical contribution was made. By his services to his contemporaries he became a symbol of America's Golden Age of oratory as it promoted conservative idealism.

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Personal Correspondence

Martha R. Cullipher to the writer, Lexington, Virginia, September 26, 1956.

Preston Davia to the writer, New York, N. Y., March 9, 1950.

G. Stables, Secretary of the University of Edinburgh, to the writer, Edinburgh, Scotland, October 2, 1956.

### BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

The writer was born on October 22, 1920, at Cecil, Arkansas. He attended the University of Arkansas one semester during the academic term, 1939-1940. Enlisting in the United States Marine Corps in August, 1942, he served in the capacities of aviation ordnanceman, anti-tank officer, battalion adjutant, and military police officer. Following his separation from the Marine Corps in May, 1946, he reentered the University of Arkansas, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Science in Education in June, 1949. In September, 1949, he began his graduate study at the University of Florida and was awarded the M. A. degree in Speech and English in August, 1950. Following a two-year period of teaching at the University of Arkansas, he resumed his residence work at the University of Florida, passing the qualifying examinations for the Ph. D. degree in March, 1954. During the entire period of his residence, he held a University of Florida scholarship. From June, 1954, to August, 1956, he held the position of Assistant Professor in Speech at the University of Arkansas. The completion of his dissertation requirement has been accomplished at the University of Florida during the session of 1956-1957, under a research fellowship awarded him by The Southern Regional Fellowships Fund. He is a member of Kappa Delta Pi, Phi Kappa Phi, Omicron Delta Kappa, Tau Kappa Alpha, and the Masonic Order.

This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the chairman of the candidate's supervisory committee and has been approved by all members of the committee. It was submitted to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council and was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

June 3, 1957

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